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# CARRISTON'S GIFT.

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## PART I.

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TOLD BY PHILIP BRAND, M.D., LONDON.

### I.

I WISH I had the courage to begin this tale by turning to my professional visiting-books, and taking at random any month out of the last twenty years, give its records as a fair sample of my ordinary work. The dismal extract would tell you what a doctor's—I suppose I may say a successful doctor's—lot is, when his practice lies in a poor and densely populated district of London. Dreary as such a beginning might be, it would perhaps allay some of the incredulity which this tale may probably provoke, as it would plainly show how little room there is for things imaginative or romantic in work so hard as mine, or among such grim realities of poverty, pain, and grief as those by which I have been surrounded. It would cer-

tainly make it appear extremely unlikely that I should have found time to imagine, much less to write, a romance or melodrama.

The truth is that when a man has toiled from nine o'clock in the morning until nine o'clock at night, such leisure as he can enjoy is precious to him, especially when even that short respite is liable to be broken in upon at any moment.

Still, in spite of the doleful picture I have drawn of what may be called "the daily grind," I begin this tale with the account of a holiday.

In the autumn of 1864 I turned my back with right good-will upon London streets, hospitals and patients, and took my seat in the North express. The first revolution of the wheels sent a thrill of delight through my jaded frame. A joyful sensation of freedom came over me. I had really got away at last! Moreover, I had left no address behind me, so for three blessed weeks might roam an undisputed lord of myself. Three weeks were not very many to take out of the fifty-two, but they were all I could venture to give myself; for even at that time my practice, if not so lucrative as I could wish, was a large and increasing one. Having done a twelve-months' hard work, I felt that no one in the kingdom could take his holiday with a conscience clearer than mine, so I lay back in a peculiarly contented frame of mind, and discounted the coming pleasures of my brief respite from labor.

There are many ways of passing a holiday—many places at which it may be spent ; but, after all, if you wish to thoroughly enjoy it, there is but one royal rule to be followed. That is, simply to please yourself—go where you like, and mount the innocent holiday hobby which is dearest to your heart, let its name be botany, geology, entomology, conchology, venery, piscation, or what not. Then you shall be happy, and return well braced up for the battle of life. I knew a City clerk with literary tastes who invariably spent his annual fortnight among the mustiest tomes of the British Museum, and averred that his health was more benefited by so doing than if he had passed the time inhaling the freshest sea-breezes. I dare say he was right in his assertion.

Sketching has always been my favorite holiday pursuit. Poor as my drawings may be, nevertheless, as I turn them over in my portfolio, they bring, to me at least, vivid remembrances of many sweet and picturesque spots, happy days, and congenial companions. It is not for me to say any thing of their actual merits, but they are dear to me for their associations.

This particular year I went to North Wales, and made Bettwys-y-Coed my headquarters. I staid at the Royal Oak, that well-known little inn dear to many an artist's heart, and teeming with reminiscences of famous men who have sojourned there times without number. It was here I made the

acquaintance of whose life the curious events I am going to narrate are connected.

On the first day after my arrival at Bettwys my appreciation of my liberty was so thorough, my appetite for the enjoyment of the beauties of Nature so keen and insatiable, that I went so far and saw so much, that when I returned to the Royal Oak night had fallen and the hour of dinner had long passed by. I was, when my own meal was placed on the table, the only occupant of the coffee-room. Just then a young man entered, and ordered something to eat. The waiter knowing, no doubt, something of the frank *camaraderie* which exists, or should exist, between the followers of Melpomene, laid his cover at my table. The new-comer seated himself, gave me a pleasant smile and a nod, and in five minutes we were in full swing of conversation.

The moment my eyes fell upon the young man I had noticed how singularly handsome he was. Charles Carriston—for this I found afterward to be his name—was about twenty-two years of age. He was tall but slightly built, his whole bearing and figure being remarkably elegant and graceful. He looked even more than gentlemanly—he looked distinguished. His face was pale, its features well-cut, straight, and regular. His forehead spoke of high intellectual qualities, and there was somewhat of that development over the eyebrows which phrenologists, I believe, consider as evi-

dence of the possession of imagination. The general expression of his face was one of seriousness, if not sadness, and its refined beauty was heightened by a pair of soft, dark, dreamy-looking eyes.

It only remains to add that, from his attire, I judged him to be an artist—a professional artist—to the backbone. In the course of conversation I showed him how I had classified him. He smiled.

“I am only an amateur,” he said; “an idle man, nothing more—and you?”

“Alas! I am a doctor.”

“Then we shall not have to answer for our sins in painting to each other.”

We talked on pleasantly until our bodily wants were satisfied by the good fare placed before us. Then came that pleasant craving for tobacco which, after a good meal, is natural to a well-regulated digestion.

“Shall we go and smoke outside?” said Carriston. “The night is delicious.”

We went out and sat on one of the wooden benches. As my new friend said, the night was delicious. There was scarcely a breath of air moving. The stars and the moon shone brightly, and the rush of the not far distant stream came to us with a soothing murmur. Near us were three or four jovial young artists. They were in merry mood; one of them had that day sold a

picture to a tourist. We listened to their banter until, most likely growing thirsty, they re-entered the inn.

Carriston had said little since we had been out-of-doors. He smoked his cigar placidly and gazed up at the skies. With the white moonlight falling on his strikingly beautiful face—the graceful pose into which he fell—he seemed to me the embodiment of poetry. He paid no heed to the merry talk of the artists, which so much amused me—indeed, I doubted if he heard their voices.

Yet he must have done so, for as soon as they had left us he came out of his reverie.

“It must be very nice,” he said, “to have to make one’s living by art.”

“Nice for those who can make livings by it,” I answered.

“All can do that who are worth it. The day of neglected genius is gone by. Müller was the last sufferer, I think—and he died young.”

“If you are so sanguine, why not try your own luck at it?”

“I would; but unfortunately I am a rich man.”

I laughed at this misplaced regret. Then Carriston, in the most simple way, told me a good deal about himself. He was an orphan, an only child. He had already ample means; but Fortune had still favors in store for him. At the death of his uncle, now an aged man, he must succeed to a large estate and a baronetcy. The natural,

unaffected way in which he made these confidences, moreover made them not, I knew, from any wish to increase his importance in my eyes, greatly impressed me. By the time we parted for the night I had grown much interested in my new acquaintance—an interest not untinged by envy. Young, handsome, rich, free to come or go, work or play as he listed! Happy Carriston!

## II.

I AM disposed to think that never before did a sincere friendship, one which was fated to last unbroken for years, ripen so quickly as that between Carriston and myself. As I now look back I find it hard to associate him with any, even a brief period of time subsequent to our meeting, during which he was not my bosom friend. I forget whether our meeting at the same picturesque spot on the morning which followed our self-introduction was the result of accident or arrangement. Anyway, we spent the day together, and that day was the precursor of many passed in each other's society. Morning after morning we sallied forth to do our best to transfer the same bits of scenery to our sketching blocks. Evening after evening we returned to dine side by side, and afterward to talk and smoke together, in-doors or out-doors as the temperature advised or our wishes inclined.



Great friends we soon became—inseparable as long as my short holiday lasted. It was, perhaps, pleasant for each to work in company with an amateur like himself. We could ask each the other's opinion of the merits of the work done, and feel happy at the approval duly given. An artist's standard of excellence is too high for a non-professional. When he praises your work he praises it but as the work of an outsider. You feel that such commendation damns it and disheartens you.

However, had Carriston cared to do so, he might, I think, have fearlessly submitted his productions to any conscientious critic—his drawings were immeasurably more artistic and powerful than mine. He had undoubtedly great talent, and I was much surprised to find that, good as he was at landscape, he was even better at the figure. He could, with a firm, bold hand, draw rapidly the most marvellous likenesses. So spirited and true were some of the studies he showed me, that I could without flattery advise him, provided he could finish as he began, to keep entirely to the higher branch of the art. I have now before me a series of outline faces drawn by him—many of them from memory; and as I look at them the original of each comes at once before my eyes.

From the very first I had been much interested in the young man, and as day by day went by, and the peculiarities of his character were revealed to

me, my interest grew deeper and deeper. I flatter myself that I am a keen observer and skillful analyst of personal character, and until now fancied that to write a description of its component parts was an easy matter. Yet now when I am put to the proof I find it no simple task to convey in words a proper idea of Charles Carriston's mental organization.

I soon discovered that he was, I may say, afflicted by a peculiarly sensitive nature. Although strong, and apparently in good health, the very changes of the weather seemed to affect him almost to the same extent as they affect a flower. Sweet as his disposition always was, the tone of his mind, his spirit, his conversation, varied, as it were, with the atmosphere. He was full of imagination, and that imagination, always rich, was at times weird, even grotesquely weird. Not for one moment did he seem to doubt the stability of the wild theories he started, or the possibility of the poetical dreams he dreamed being realized. He had his faults of course; he was hasty and impulsive, indeed to me one of the greatest charms about the boy was that, right or wrong, each word he spoke came straight from his heart.

So far as I could judge, the whole organization of his mind was too highly strung, too finely wrought for every-day use. A note of joy, of sorrow, even of pity vibrated through it too strongly for his comfort or well-being. As yet it had not

been called upon to bear the test of love, and fortunately—I use the word advisedly—fortunately he was not, according to the usual significance of the word, a religious man, or I should have thought it not unlikely that some day he would fall a victim to that religious mania so well known to my professional brethren, and have developed hysteria or melancholia. He might even have fancied himself a messenger sent from heaven for the regeneration of mankind. From natures like Carriston's are prophets made.

In short, I may say that my exhaustive study of my new friend's character resulted in a certain amount of uneasiness as to his future—an uneasiness not entirely free from professional curiosity.

Although the smile came readily and frequently to his lips, the general bent of his disposition was sad, even despondent and morbid. And yet few young men's lives promised to be so pleasant as Charles Carriston's.

I was rallying him one day on his future rank and its responsibilities.

“You will, of course, be disgustingly rich?” I said.

Carriston sighed. “Yes, if I live long enough ; but I don't suppose I shall.”

“Why in the world shouldn't you? You look pale and thin, but are in capital health. Twelve long miles we have walked to-day—you never turned a hair.”

Carriston made no reply. He seemed in deep thought.

"Your friends ought to look after you and get you a wife," I said.

"I have no friends," he said, sadly. "No nearer relation than a cousin a good deal older than I am, who looks upon me as one who was born to rob him of what should be his."

"But by the law of primogeniture, so sacred to the upper ten thousand, he must know you are entitled to it."

"Yes; but for years and years I was always going to die. My life was not thought worth six months' purchase. All of a sudden I got well. Ever since then, I have seemed, even to myself, a kind of interloper."

"It must be unpleasant to have a man longing for one's death. All the more reason you should marry and put other lives between him and the title."

"I fancy I shall never marry," said Carriston, looking at me with his soft, dark eyes. "You see, a boy who has waited for years expecting to die, doesn't grow up with exactly the same feelings as other people. I don't think I shall ever meet a woman I care for enough to make my wife. No, I expect my cousin will be Sir Ralph yet."

I tried to laugh him out of his morbid ideas. "Those who live will see," I said. "Only prom-

ise to ask me to your wedding, and better still, if you live in town, appoint me your family doctor. It may prove the nucleus of that West End practice which it is the dream of every doctor to establish."

I have already alluded to the strange beauty of Carriston's dark eyes. As soon as companionship commenced between us those eyes became to me, from scientific reasons, objects of curiosity on account of the mysterious expression which at times I detected in them. Often and often they wore a look the like to which, I imagine, is found only in the eyes of a somnambulist—a look which one feels certain is intently fixed upon something, yet upon something beyond the range of one's own vision. During the first two or three days of our new-born intimacy I found this eccentricity of Carriston's positively startling. When now and then I turned to him, and found him staring with all his might at nothing, my eyes were compelled to follow the direction in which his own were bent. It was at first impossible to divest one's self of the belief that something should be there to justify so fixed a gaze. However, as the rapid growth of our friendly intercourse soon showed me that he was a boy of most ardent poetic temperament—perhaps, even more a poet than an artist—I laid these absent looks and recurring flights into vacancy at the door of the Muse,

We were at the Fairy Glen one morning, sketching, to the best of our ability, the swirling stream, the gray rocks, and the overhanging trees, the last just growing brilliant with autumnal tints. So beautiful was every thing around that for a long time I worked, idled, or dreamed in contented silence. Carriston had set up his easel at some little distance from mine. At last I turned to see how his sketch was progressing. He had evidently fallen into one of his brown studies, and apparently, a harder one than usual. His brush had fallen from his fingers, his features were immovable, and his strange dark eyes were absolutely riveted upon a large rock in front of him, at which he gazed as intently as if his hope of heaven depended upon seeing through it.

He seemed for the while oblivious to things mundane. A party of laughing, chattering, terrible tourist girls scrambled down the rugged steps, and one by one passed in front of him. Neither their presence nor the inquisitive glances they cast on his statuesque face roused him from his fit of abstraction. For a moment I wondered if the boy took opium or some other narcotic on the sly. Full of the thought I rose, crossed over to him, and laid my hand upon his shoulder. As he felt my touch he came to himself, and looked up at me in a dazed, inquiring way.

“Really, Carriston,” I said, laughingly, “you

must reserve your dreaming fits until we are in places where tourists do not congregate, or you will be thought a madman, or at least a poet."

He made no reply. He turned away from me impatiently, even rudely; then, picking up his brush, went on with his sketch. After a while he seemed to recover from his pettishness, and we spent the remainder of the day as pleasantly as usual.

As we trudged home in the twilight, he said to me in an apologetic, almost penitent way,

"I hope I was not rude to you just now."

"When do you mean?" I asked, having almost forgotten the trivial incident.

"When you woke me from what you called my dreaming."

"Oh dear, no. You were not at all rude. If you had been, it was but the penalty due to my presumption. The flights of genius should be respected, not checked, by a material hand."

"That is nonsense; I am not a genius, and you must forgive me for my rudeness," said Carriston, simply. After walking some distance in silence he spoke again.

"I wish when you are with me you would try and stop me from getting into that state. It does me no good."

Seeing he was in earnest I promised to do my best, and was curious enough to ask him whither

his thoughts wandered during those abstracted moments.

"I can scarcely tell you," he said. Presently he asked, speaking with hesitation, "I suppose you never feel that under certain circumstances—circumstances which you can not explain—you might be able to see things which are invisible to others."

"To see things. What things?"

"Things, as I said, which no one else can see. You must know there are people who possess this power."

"I know that certain people have asserted they possess what they call second sight; but the assertion is too absurd to waste time in refuting."

"Yet," said Carriston dreamily, "I know that if I did not strive to avoid it some such power would come to me."

"You are too ridiculous, Carriston," I said. "Some people see what others don't because they have longer sight. You may, of course, imagine any thing. But your eyes—handsome eyes they are, too—contain certain properties, known as humors and lenses, therefore in order to see—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Carriston; "I know exactly all you are going to say. You, a man of science, ridicule every thing which breaks what you are pleased to call the law of Nature. Yet take all the unaccountable tales told. Nine hun-



dred and ninety-nine you expose to scorn or throw grave doubt upon, yet the thousandth rests on evidence which can not be upset or disputed. The possibility of that one proves the possibility of all."

"Not at all; but enough for your argument," I said, amused at the boy's wild talk.

"You doctors," he continued, with that delicate air of superiority so often assumed by laymen when they are in good health, "put too much to the credit of diseased imagination."

"No doubt: it's a convenient shelf on which to put a difficulty. But go on."

"The body is your province, yet you can't explain why a cataleptic patient should hear a watch tick when it is placed against his foot."

"Nor you; nor any one. But perhaps it may aid you to get rid of your rubbishing theories if I tell you that catalepsy, as you understand it, is a disease not known to us; in fact, it does not exist."

He seemed crestfallen at hearing this. "But what do you want to prove?" I asked. "What have you seen yourself?"

"Nothing, I tell you. And I pray I may never see any thing."

After this he seemed inclined to shirk the subject, but I pinned him to it. I was really anxious to get at the true state of his mind: In answer to the leading questions with which I plied him,

Carriston revealed an amount of superstition which seemed utterly childish and out of place beside the intellectual faculties which he undoubtedly possessed. So much so, that at last I felt more inclined to laugh than to argue with him.

Yet I was not altogether amused by his talk. His wild arguments and wilder beliefs made me fancy there must be a weak spot somewhere in his brain—even made me fear lest his end might be madness. The thought made me sad; for with the exception of the eccentricities which I have mentioned, I reckoned Carriston the pleasantest friend I had ever made. His amiable nature, his good looks, and perfect breeding had endeared the young man to me; so much so that I resolved, during the remainder of the time that we should spend together, to do all I could toward taking the nonsense out of him.

My efforts were unavailing. I kept a sharp look-out upon him, and let him fall into no more mysterious reveries; but the curious idea that he possessed, or could possess, some gift above human nature, was too firmly rooted to be displaced. On all other subjects he argued fairly and was open to reason. On this one point he was immovable. When I could get him to notice my attacks at all, his answer was:

“You doctors, clever as you are with the body, know as little of psychology as you did three thousand years ago.”

When the time came for me to fold up my easel and return to the drudgery of life, I parted from Carriston with much regret. One of those solemn, but often broken, promises to join together next year in another sketching tour passed between us. Then I went back to London, and during the subsequent months, although I saw nothing of him, I often thought of my friend of the autumn.

### III.

IN the spring of 1865 I went down to Bournemouth, to see for the last time an old friend who was dying of consumption. During a great part of the journey down I had for a traveling companion a well-dressed, gentlemanly man of about forty years of age. We were alone in the compartment, and after interchanging some small civilities, such as the barter of newspapers, slid into conversation.

My fellow-traveler seemed to be an intellectual man, and well posted up in the doings of the day. He talked fluently and easily on various topics, and judging by his talk must have moved in good society. Although I fancied his features bore traces of hard living and dissipation, he was not unprepossessing in appearance. The greatest faults in his face were the remarkable thinness of the lips, and his eyes being a shade closer together than one cares to see. With a casual acquaintance

such peculiarities are of little moment, but for my part I should not choose one who possessed them for a friend without due trial and searching proof.

At this time the English public were much interested in an important will case which was now being tried. The reversion to a vast sum of money depended upon the testator's sanity or insanity. Like most other people we duly discussed the matter. I suppose, from some of my remarks, my companion understood that I was a doctor. He asked me a good many technical questions, and I described several curious cases of mania which had come under my notice. He seemed greatly interested in the subject.

"You must sometimes find it hard to say where sanity ends and insanity begins," he said, thoughtfully.

"Yes. The boundary line is in some instances hard to define. To give in such a dubious case an opinion which would satisfy myself I should want to have known the patient at the time he was considered quite sane."

"To mark the difference?"

"Exactly. And to know the bent of the character. For instance, there is a friend of mine. He was perfectly sane when last I saw him, but for all I know he may have made great progress the other way in the interval."

Then without mentioning names, dates, or places, I described Carriston's peculiar disposition

to my intelligent listener. He heard me with rapt interest.

"You predict he will go mad?" he said.

"Certainly not. Unless any thing unforeseen arises he will probably live and die as sane as you or I."

"Why do you fear for him, then?"

"For this reason. I think that any sudden emotion—violent grief, for instance—any unexpected and crushing blow, might at once disturb the balance of his mind. Let his life run on in an even groove, and all will be well with him."

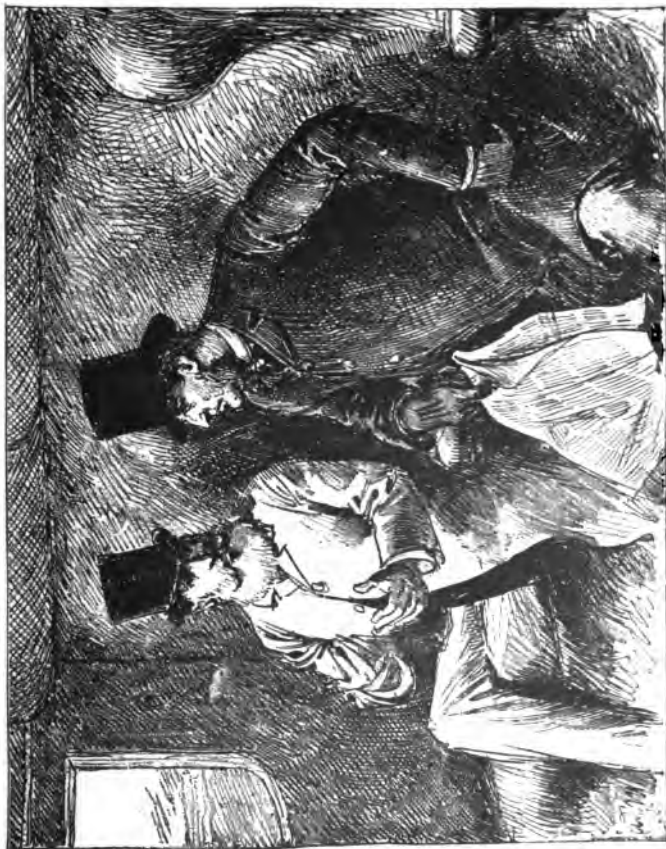
My companion was silent for a few moments.

"Did you mention your friend's name?" he asked.

I laughed. "Doctors never give names when they quote cases."

At the next station my companion left the train. He bade me a polite adieu, and thanked me for the pleasure my conversation had given him. After wondering what station in life he occupied, I dismissed him from my mind as one who had crossed my path for a short time, and would probably never cross it again.

Although I did not see Charles Carriston I received several letters from him during the course of the year. He had not forgotten our undertaking to pass my next holiday together. Early in the autumn, just as I was beginning to long with a passionate longing for open air and blue skies,



“ ‘ YOU PREDICT HE WILL GO MAD, HE SAID.’ ”



a letter came from Carriston. He was now, he said, roughing it in the Western Highlands. He reminded me of last year's promise. Could I get away from work now? Would I join him? If I did not care to visit Scotland would I suggest some other place where he could join me? Still, the scenery by which he was now surrounded was superb, and the accommodation he had secured, if not luxurious, fairly comfortable. He thought we could not do better. A postscript to his letter asked me to address him as Cecil Carr, not Charles Carriston. He had a reason for changing his name—a foolish reason I should no doubt call it. When we met he would let me know it.

This letter at once decided me to accept his invitation. In a week's time my arrangements for leave of absence were complete, and I was speeding northward in the highest spirits, and well equipped with every thing necessary for my favorite holiday pursuit. I looked forward with the greatest pleasure to again meeting Carriston. I found him at Callendar waiting for me. The coach did not follow the route we were obliged to take in order to reach the somewhat unfrequented part of the country in which our tent was pitched, so my friend had secured the services of a primitive vehicle and a strong shaggy pony to bear us the remainder of the journey.

So soon as our first hearty greetings were over I proceeded to ascertain how the last year had



treated Carriston. I was both delighted and astonished at the great change for the better which had taken place in his manner no less than his appearance. He looked far more robust; he seemed happier, brighter—altogether more like ordinary humanity. Not only had he greeted me with almost boisterous glee, but during our drive through the wonderful scenery he was in the gayest spirits and full of fun and anecdote. I congratulated him heartily upon the marked improvement in his health, both mental and physical.

“Yes, I am much better,” he said. “I followed a part of your advice—gave up moping, tried constant change of scene, interested myself in many more things. I am quite a different man.”

“No supernatural visitations?” I asked, anxious to learn that his cure in that direction was complete.

His face fell. He hesitated a second before answering.

“No—not now,” he said. “I fought against the strange feeling, and I believe have got rid of it—at least I hope so.”

I said no more on the subject. Carriston plunged into a series of vivid and mimetic descriptions of the varieties of Scotch character which he had met with during his stay. He depicted his experiences so amusingly that I laughed heartily for many a mile.

"But why the change in your name?" I asked, when he paused for a moment in his merry talk.

He blushed, and looked rather ashamed. "I scarcely like to tell you; you will think my reason so absurd."

"Never mind. I don't judge you by the ordinary standard."

"Well, the fact is, my cousin is also in Scotland. I feared if I gave my true name at the hotel at which I staid on my way here, he might by chance see it, and look me up in these wild regions."

"Well, and what if he did?"

"I can't tell you. I hate to know I feel like it. But I have always, perhaps without cause, been afraid of him—and this place is horribly lonely."

Now that I understood the meaning of his words I thought the boy must be joking; but the grave look on his face showed he was never further from merriment.

"Why, Carriston," I cried, "you are positively ridiculous about your cousin. You can't think the man wants to murder you."

"I don't know what I think. I am saying things to you which I ought not to say; but every time I meet him I feel he hates me, and wishes me out of the world."

"Between wishing and doing there is a great

difference. I dare say all this is fancy on your part."

"Perhaps so. Any way, Cecil Carr is as good a name up here as Charles Carriston, so please humor my whim and say no more about it."

As it made no difference to me by what name he chose to call himself I dropped the subject. I knew of old that some of his strange prejudices were proof against any thing I could do to remove them.

At last we reached our temporary abode. It was a substantial, low-built house, owned and inhabited by a thrifty, middle-aged widow, who, although well-to-do so far as the simple ideas of her neighbors went, was nevertheless always willing to add to her resources by accommodating such stray tourists as wished to bury themselves for a day or two in solitude, or artists who, like ourselves, preferred to enjoy the beauties of Nature undisturbed by the usual ebbing and flowing stream of sight-seers.

As Carriston asserted, the accommodation, if homely, was good enough for two single men; the fare was plentiful, and our rooms were the picture of cleanliness. After a cursory inspection I felt sure that I could for a few weeks make myself very happy in these quarters.

I had not been twenty-four hours in the house before I found out one reason for the great change for the better in Charles Carriston's demeanor;

knew why his step was lighter, his eye brighter, his voice gayer, and his whole bearing altered. Whether the reason was a subject for congratulation or not I could not as yet say.

The boy was in love; in love as only a passionate, romantic, imaginative nature can be; and even then only once in a lifetime. Heedless, headstrong, impulsive, and entirely his own master, he had given his very heart and soul into the keeping of a woman.

#### IV.

THAT a man of Carriston's rank, breeding, and refinement should meet his fate within the walls of a lonely farm-house, beyond the Trossachs, seems incredible. One would scarcely expect to find among such humble surroundings a wife suitable to a man of his stamp. And yet when I saw the woman who had won him I neither wondered at the conquest, nor did I blame him for weakness.

I made the great discovery on the morning after my arrival. Eager to taste the freshness of the morning air, I rose betimes and went for a short stroll. I returned, and while standing at the door of the house was positively startled by the beauty of a girl who passed me and entered, as if she were a regular inhabitant of the place. Not a rosy Scotch lassie, such as one would

expect to find indigenous to the soil ; but a slim, graceful girl, with delicate, classical features. A girl with a mass of knotted light hair, yet with the apparent anomaly, dark eyes, eyelashes, and eyebrows—a combination which, to my mind, makes a style of beauty, rare, irresistible, and dangerous above all others. The features which filled the exquisite oval of her face were refined and faultless. Her complexion was pale, but its pallor in no way suggested any thing save perfect health. To cut my enthusiastic description short I may at once say it has never been my good fortune to cast my eyes on a lovelier creature than this young girl.

Although her dress was of the plainest and simplest description, no one could have mistaken her for a servant ; and much as I admire the bonny, healthy Scotch country lasses, I felt sure that mountain air had never reared a being of this ethereally beautiful type. As she passed me I raised my hat instinctively. She gracefully bent her golden head, and bade me a quiet but unembarrassed good morning. My eyes followed her until she vanished at the end of the dark passage which led to the back of the house.

Even during the brief glimpse I enjoyed of this fair unknown a strange idea occurred to me. There was a remarkable likeness between her delicate features and those, scarcely less delicate, of Carriston. This resemblance may have added

to the interest the girl's appearance awoke in my mind. Anyway I entered our sitting-room, and, a prey to curiosity, and perhaps hunger, awaited with much impatience the appearance of Carriston—and breakfast.

The former arrived first. Generally speaking he was afoot long before I was, but this morning we had reversed the usual order of things. As soon as I saw him I cried,

“Carriston, tell me at once who is the lovely girl I met outside. An angel with dark eyes and golden hair. Is she staying here like ourselves?”

A look of pleasure flashed into his eyes—a look which pretty well told me every thing. Nevertheless he answered as carelessly as if such lovely young women were as common to the mountain side as rocks and brambles.

“I expect you mean Miss Rowan; a niece of our worthy landlady. She lives with her.”

“She can not be Scotch with such a face and eyes.”

“Half and half. Her father was called an Englishman; but was, I believe, of Scotch extraction. They say the name was originally Rohan.”

Carriston seemed to have made close inquiries as to Miss Rowan's parentage.

“But what brings her here?” I asked.

“She has nowhere else to go. Rowan was an artist. He married a sister of our hostess's, and

bore her away from her native Inad. Some years ago she died, leaving this one daughter. Last year the father died, penniless, they tell me, so the girl has since then lived with her only relative, her aunt."

"Well," I said, "as you seem to know all about her, you can introduce me by and by."

"With the greatest pleasure, if Miss Rowan permits," said Carriston. I was glad to hear him give the conditional promise with as much respect to the lady's wishes as if she had been a duchess,

Then, with the liberty a close friend may take, I drew toward me a portfolio, full, I presumed, of sketches of surrounding scenery. To my surprise Carriston jumped up hastily and snatched it from me. "They are too bad to look at," he said. As I struggled to regain possession, sundry strings broke, and, lo and behold! the floor was littered, not with delineations of rock, lake, and torrent, but with images of the fair young girl I had seen a few minutes before. Full face, profile, three-quarter face, five, even seven-eighth face, all were there—each study perfectly executed by Carriston's clever pencil. I threw myself into a chair and laughed aloud, while the young man, blushing and discomfited, quickly huddled the portraits between the covers, just as a genuine Scotch lassie bore in the plentiful, and, to me, very welcome breakfast.

Carriston did favor me with his company dur-

ing the whole of that day, but, in spite of my having come to Scotland to enjoy his society, that day, from easily guessed reasons, was the only one in which I had undisputed possession of my friend.

Of course I bantered him a great deal on the portfolio episode. He took it in good part, attempting little or no defense. Indeed, before night he had told me with all a boy's fervor how he had loved Madeline Rowan at first sight, how in the short space of time which had elapsed since that meeting he had wooed her and won her; how good and beautiful she was; how he worshiped her; how happy he felt; how, when I went south he should accompany me, and after making a few necessary arrangements, return at once and bear his bride away.

I could only listen to him, and congratulate him. It was not my place to act the elder, and advise him either for or against the marriage. Carriston had only himself to please, and if he made a rash step only himself to blame for the consequences. And why should I have dissuaded—I, who in two days envied the boy's good fortune.

I saw a good deal of Madeline Rowan. How strange and out-of-place her name and face seemed amid our surroundings. If at first somewhat shy and retiring, she soon, if only for Carrington's sake, consented to look upon me as a friend, and



talked to me freely and unreservedly. Then I found that her nature was as sweet as her face. Such a conquest did she make of me that, save for one chimerical reason, I should have felt quite certain that Carriston had chosen well, and would be happy in wedding the girl of his choice: heedless of her humble position in the world, and absence of befitting wealth. When once his wife, I felt sure that if he cared for her to win social success, her looks and bearing would insure it; and from the great improvement which, as I have already said, I noticed in his health and spirits, I believed that his marriage would make his life longer, happier, and better.

Now for my objection, which seems almost a laughable one. I objected on the score of the extraordinary resemblance which, so far as a man may resemble a woman, existed between Charles Carriston and Madeline Rowan. The more I saw them together, the more I was struck by it. A stranger might well have taken them for twin brother and sister. The same delicate features, drawn in the same lines; the same soft, dark, dreamy eyes; even the same shaped heads. Comparing the two, it needed no phrenologist or physiognomist to tell you where one excelled, the other excelled; where one failed, the other was wanting. Now, could I have selected a wife for my friend, I would have chosen one with habits and constitution entirely different from his own.

She should have been a bright, bustling woman, with lots of energy and common sense—one who would have rattled him about and kept him going—not a lovely, dark-eyed, dreamy girl, who could for hours at a stretch make herself supremely happy if only sitting at her lover's feet and speaking no word. Yet they were a handsome couple, and never have I seen two people so utterly devoted to each other as those two seemed to be during those autumn days which I spent with them.

I soon had a clear proof of the closeness of their mental resemblance. One evening, Carriston Madeline and I were sitting out-of-doors, watching the gray mist deepening in the valley at our feet. Two of the party were, of course, hand in hand, the third seated at a discreet distance—not so far away as to preclude conversation, but far enough off to be able to pretend that he saw and heard only what was intended for his eyes and ears.

How certain topics which I would have avoided discussing with Carriston were started I hardly remember. Probably some strange tale had been passed down from wilder and even more solitary regions than ours—some ridiculous tale of Highland superstition, no doubt embellished and augmented by each one who repeated it to his fellows. From her awed talk I soon found that Madeline Rowan, perhaps by reason of the Scotch blood in

her veins, was as firm a believer in things visionary and beyond Nature as ever Charles Carriston in his silliest moments could be. As soon as I could I stopped the talk, and the next day, finding the girl for a few minutes alone, told her plainly that subjects of this kind should be kept as far as possible from her future husband's thoughts. She promised obedience, with dreamy eyes which looked as far away and full of visions as Carriston's.

"By the by," I said, "has he ever spoken to you about seeing strange things?"

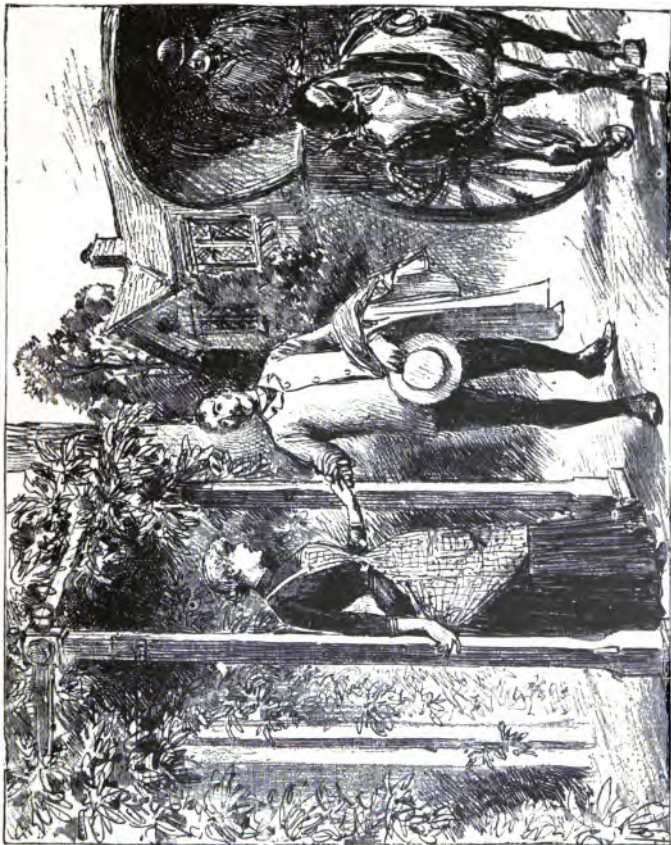
"Yes; he has hinted at it."

"And you believe him?"

"Of course I do—he told me so."

This was unanswerable. "A pretty pair they will make," I muttered, as Madeline slipped from me to welcome her lover, who was approaching. "They will see ghosts in every corner, and goblins behind every curtain."

Nevertheless, the young people had no doubts about their coming bliss. Every thing was going smoothly and pleasantly for them. Carriston had at once spoken to Madeline's aunt, and obtained the old Scotchwoman's ready consent to their union. I was rather vexed at his still keeping to his absurd whim, and concealing his true name. He said he was afraid of alarming the aunt by telling her he was passing under an alias, while if he gave Madeline his true reason for so doing she



"I WAITED MANY, MANY MINUTES WHILE CARRISTON STOOD HAND IN HAND WITH MADELINE."



would be miserable. Moreover, I found he had formed the romantic plan of marrying her without telling her in what an enviable position she would be placed, so far as worldly gear went. A kind of Lord of Burleigh surprise no doubt commended itself to his imaginative brain.

The last day of my holiday came. I bade a long and sad farewell to lake and mountain, and, accompanied by Carriston, started for home. I did not see the parting proper between the young people—that was far too sacred a thing to be intruded upon—but even when that protracted affair was over, I waited many, many minutes while Carriston stood hand in hand with Madeline, comforting himself and her by reiterating “Only six weeks—six short weeks! And then—and then!” It was the girl who at last tore herself away, and then Carriston mounted reluctantly by my side on the rough vehicle.

From Edinburgh we traveled by the night train. The greater part of the way we had the compartment to ourselves. Carriston, as a lover will, talked of nothing but coming bliss and his plans for the future. After a while I grew quite weary of the monotony of the subject, and at last dozed off, and for some little time slept. The shrill whistle which told us a tunnel was at hand aroused me. My companion was sitting opposite to me, and as I glanced across at him my attention was arrested by the same strange intense

look which I had on a previous occasion at Bettwys-y-Coed noticed in his eyes—the same fixed stare—the same obliviousness to all that was passing. Remembering his request, I shook him, somewhat roughly, back to his senses. He regarded me for a moment vacantly, then said,

“Now I have found out what was wanting to make the power I told you of complete. I could see her if I wished.”

“Of course you can see her—in your mind's eye. All lovers can do that.”

“If I tried I could see her bodily—know exactly what she is doing.” He spoke with an air of complete conviction.

“Then I hope, for the sake of modesty, you won't try. It is now nearly three o'clock. She ought to be in bed and 'asleep.”

I spoke lightly, thinking it better to try and laugh him out of his folly. He took no notice of my sorry joke.

“No,” he said, quietly, “I am not going to try. But I know now what was wanting. Love—such love as mine—such love as hers—makes the connecting link, and enables sight or some other sense to cross over space, and pass through every material obstacle.”

“Look here, Carriston,” I said, seriously, “you are talking like a madman talks. I don't want to frighten you, but I am bound both as a doctor and your sincere friend to tell you that unless you

cure yourself of these absurd delusions, they will grow upon you, develop fresh forms, and you will probably end your days under restraint. Ask any doctor, he will tell you the same."

"Doctors are a clever race," answered my strange young friend, "but they don't know every thing."

So saying he closed his eyes and appeared to sleep.

We parted upon reaching London. Many kind words and wishes passed between us, and I gave him some more well-meant, and, I believed, needed warnings. He was going down to see his uncle, the baronet. Then he had some matters to arrange with his lawyers, and above all had to select a residence for himself and his wife. He would no doubt be in London for a short time. If possible he would come and see me. Any way, he would write and let me know the exact date of his approaching marriage. If I could manage to come to it so much the better. If not he would try, as they passed through town, to bring his bride to pay me a flying and friendly visit. He left me in the best of spirits, and I went back to my patients and worked hard to make up lost ground, and counteract whatever errors had been committed by my substitute.

Some six weeks afterward—late at night—while I was deep in a new and clever treatise on zymotics, a man haggard, wild, unshorn, and



unkempt rushed past my startled servant, and entered the room in which I sat. He threw himself into a chair, and I was horrified to recognize in the intruder my clever and brilliant friend, Charles Carriston !

## V.

"THE end has come sooner than I expected." These were the sad words I muttered to myself as, waving my frightened servant away, I closed the door, and stood alone with the supposed maniac. He rose and wrung my hand, then without a word sank back into his chair and buried his face in his hands. A sort of nervous trembling seemed to run through his frame. Deeply distressed I drew his hands from his face.

"Now, Carriston," I said as firmly as I could, "look up and tell me what all this means. Look up, I say, man, and speak to me."

He raised his eyes to mine and kept them there, while a ghastly smile—a phantom of humor—flickered across his white face. No doubt his native quickness told him what I suspected, so he looked me full and steadily in the face.

"No," he said, "not as you think. But let there be no mistake. Question me. Talk to me. Put me to any test. Satisfy yourself, once for all, that I am as sane as you are."

He spoke so rationally, his eyes met mine so

unflinchingly, that I was rejoiced to know that my fears were as yet ungrounded. There was grief, excitement, want of rest in his appearance, but his general manner told me he was, as he said, as sane as I was.

"Thank heaven you can speak to me and look at me like this," I exclaimed.

"You are satisfied then?" he said.

"On this point, yes. Now tell me what is wrong?"

Now that he had set my doubts at rest, his agitation and excitement seemed to return. He grasped my hand convulsively.

"Madeline!" he whispered. "Madeline—my love—she is gone."

"Gone!" I repeated. "Gone where?"

"She is gone, I say—stolen from me by some black-hearted traitor—perhaps forever. Who can tell?"

"But, Carriston, surely in so short a time her love can not have been won by another. If so, all I can say is—"

"What!" he shouted. "You who have seen her! You in your wildest dreams to imagine that Madeline Rowan would leave me of her own free will! No, sir, she has been stolen from me—entrapped—carried away—hidden. But I will find her, or I will kill the black-hearted villain who has done this."

He rose and paced the room. His face was

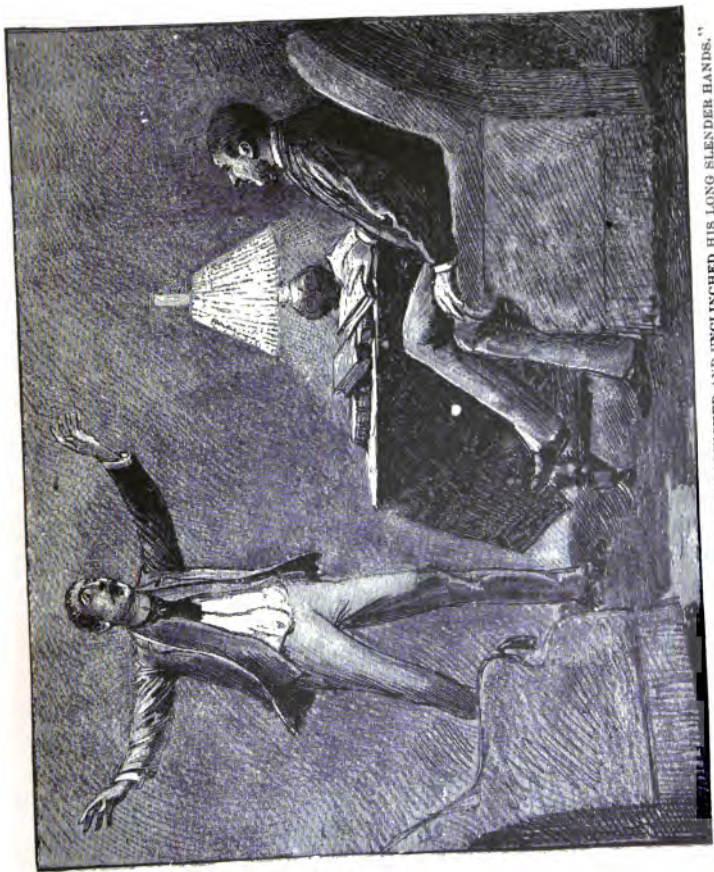
distorted with rage. He clinched and unclined his long slender hands.

"My dear fellow," I said, "you are talking riddles. Sit down and tell me calmly what has happened. But, first of all, as you look utterly worn out, I will ring for my man to get you some food."

"No," he said, "I want nothing. Weary I am, for I have been to Scotland and back as fast as man can travel. I reached London a short time ago, and after seeing one man have come straight to you, my only friend, for help—it may be for protection. But I have eaten and I have drank, knowing I must keep my health and strength."

However, I insisted upon some wine being brought. He drank a glass, and then with a strange, enforced calm, told me what had taken place. His tale was this:

After we had parted company on our return from Scotland, Carriston went down to the family seat in Oxfordshire, and informed his uncle of the impending change in his life. The baronet, an extremely old man, infirm and all but childish, troubled little about the matter. Every acre of his large property was strictly entailed, so his pleasure or his displeasure could make but little alteration in his nephew's prospects. Still, he was the head of the family, and Carriston was in duty bound to make the important news known to him. The young man made no secret of his



"HIS FACE WAS DISTORTED WITH RAGE. HE CLINCHED AND UNCLINCHED HIS LONG SLENDER HANDS."



approaching marriage, so in a short time every member of the family was aware that the heir and future head was about to ally himself to a nobody. Knowing nothing of Madeline Rowan's rare beauty and sweet nature, Carriston's kinsmen and women were sparing with their congratulations. Indeed, Mr. Ralph Carriston, the cousin whose name was coupled with such absurd suspicions, went so far as to write a bitter, sarcastic letter, full of ironical felicitations. This, and Charles Carriston's haughty reply, did not make the affections between the cousins any stronger. Moreover, shortly afterward the younger man heard that inquiries were being made in the neighborhood of Madeline's home as to her position and parentage. Feeling sure that only his cousin Ralph could have had the curiosity to institute such inquiries, he wrote and thanked him for the keen interest he was manifesting in his future welfare, but begged that hereafter Mr. Carriston would apply to him direct for any information he wanted. The two men were now no longer on speaking terms.

Charles Carriston, in his present frame of mind, cared little whether his relatives wished to bless or forbid the banns. He was passionately in love, and at once set about making arrangements for a speedy marriage. Although Madeline was still ignorant of the exalted position held by her lover—although she came to him absolutely pen-

niless, he was resolved in the matter of money to treat her as generously as he would have treated the most eligible damsel in the country. There were several legal questions to be set at rest concerning certain property he wished to settle upon her. These of course caused delay. As soon as they were adjusted to his own, or, rather, to his lawyer's satisfaction, he purposed going to Scotland and carrying away his beautiful bride. In the mean time he cast about for a residence.

Somewhat Bohemian in his nature, Carriston had no intention of settling down just yet to live the life of an ordinary moneyed Englishman. His intention was to take Madeline abroad for some months. He had fixed upon Cannes as a desirable place at which to winter, but having grown somewhat tired of hotel life wished to rent a furnished house. He had received from an agent to whom he had been advised to apply the refusal of a house which, from the glowing description given, seemed the one above all others he wanted. As an early decision was insisted upon, my impulsive young friend thought nothing of crossing the Channel and running down to the south of France, to see with his own eyes, that the much lauded place was worthy of the fair being who was to be its temporary mistress.

He wrote to Madeline, and told her he was going from home for a few days. He said he should be traveling the greatest part of the time, so it

would be no use her writing to him until his return. He did not reveal the object of his journey. Were Madeline to know it was to choose a winter residence at Cannes, she would be filled with amazement, and the innocent deception he was still keeping up would not be carried through to the romantic end which he pictured to himself.

The day before he started for France Madeline wrote that her aunt was very unwell, but said nothing as to her malady causing any alarm. Perhaps Carriston thought less about the old Scotch widow than her relationship and kindness to Miss Rowan merited. He started on his travels without any forebodings of evil.

His journey to Cannes and back was hurried—he wasted no time on the road, but was delayed for two days at the place itself before he could make final arrangements with the owner and the present occupier of the house. Thinking he was going to start every moment he did not write to Madeline—at the rate at which he meant to return, a letter posted in England would reach her almost as quickly as if posted at Cannes.

He reached his home, which for the last few weeks had been Oxford, and found two letters waiting for him. The first, dated on the day he left England, was from Madeline. It told him that her aunt's illness had suddenly taken a fatal turn—that she had died that day, almost without warning. The second letter was anonymous.



It was written apparently by a woman, and advised Mr. Carr to look sharply after his lady-love or he would find himself left in the lurch. The writer would not be surprised to hear some fine day that she had eloped with a certain gentleman who should be nameless. This precious epistle, probably an emanation of feminine spite, Carriston treated as it deserved—he tore it up and threw the pieces to the wind.

But the thought of Madeline being alone at that lonely house troubled him greatly. The dead woman had no sons or daughters—all the anxiety and responsibility connected with her affairs would fall on the poor girl. The next day he threw himself into the Scotch Express, and started for her far-away home.

On arriving there he found it occupied only by the rough farm servants. They seemed in a state of wonderment, and volubly questioned Carriston as to the whereabouts of Madeline. The question sent a chill of fear to his heart. He answered their questions by others, and soon learned all they had to communicate.

Little enough it was. On the morning after the old woman's funeral Madeline had gone to Collendar to ask the advice of an old friend of her aunt as to what steps should now be taken. She had neither been to this friend, nor had she returned home. She had, however, sent a message that she must go to London at once, and would

write from there. That was the last heard of her—all that was known about her.

Upon hearing this news Carriston became a prey to the acutest terror—an emotion which was quite inexplicable to the honest people, his informants. The girl had gone, but she had sent word whither she had gone. True, they did not know the reason for her departure, so sudden and without luggage of any description—true, she had not written as promised, but no doubt they would hear from her to-morrow. Carriston knew better. Without revealing the extent of his fears, he flew back to Callendar. Inquiries at the railway station informed him that she had gone, or had purposed going, to London, but whether she ever reached it, or whether any trace of her could be found there, was at least a matter of doubt. No good could be gained by remaining in Scotland, so he traveled back at once to town, half distracted, sleepless, and racking his brain to know where to look for her.

“She has been decoyed away,” he said in conclusion. “She is hidden, imprisoned somewhere. And I know, as well as if he told me, who has done this thing. I can trace Ralph Carriston’s cursed hand through it all.”

I glanced at him askance. This morbid suspicion of his cousin amounted almost to monomania. He had told the tale of Madeline’s disappearance clearly and tersely; but when he began

to account for it his theory was a wild and untenable one. However much he suspected Ralph Carriston of longing to stand in his shoes, I could see no object for the crime of which he accused him, that of decoying away Madeline Rowan.

“But why should he have done this?” I asked. “To prevent your marriage? You are young—he must have foreseen that you would marry some day.”

Carriston leaned toward me, and dropped his voice to a whisper.

“This is his reason,” he said—“this is why I come to you. You are not the only one who has entirely misread my nature, and seen a strong tendency to insanity in it. Of course I know that you are all wrong, but I know that Ralph Carriston has stolen my love—stolen her because he thinks and hopes that her loss will drive me mad—perhaps drive me to kill myself. I went straight to him—I have just come from him—Brand, I tell you that when I taxed him with the crime—when I raved at him—when I threatened to tear the life out of him—his cold, wicked eyes leaped with joy. I heard him mutter between his teeth, ‘Men have been put in strait-waistcoats for less than this.’ Then I knew why he had done this. I curbed myself and left him. Most likely he will try to shut me up as a lunatic; but I count on your protection—count on your help to find my love.”

That any man could be guilty of such a subtle refinement of crime as that of which he accused his cousin seemed to me, if not impossible, at least improbable. But as at present there was no doubt about my friend's sanity I promised my aid readily.

"And now," I said, "my dear boy, I won't hear another word to-night. Nothing can be done until to-morrow; then we will consult as to what steps should be taken. Drink this and go to bed—yes, you are as sane as I am, but, remember, insomnia soon drives the strongest man out of his senses."

I poured out an opiate. He drank it obediently. Before I left him for the night I saw him in bed and sleeping a heavy sleep.

## VI.

THE advantage to one who writes, not a tale of imagination, but a simple record of events, is this: He need not be bound by the recognized canons of the story-telling art—need not exercise his ingenuity to mislead his reader—need not suppress some things and lay undue stress on others to create mysteries to be cleared up at the end of the tale. Therefore, using the privilege of a plain narrator, I shall here give some account of what became of Miss Rowan as, so far as I can remember, I heard it some time afterward from her own lips.

The old Scotchwoman's funeral over, and those friends who had been present departed, Madeline was left in the little farmhouse alone, save for the presence of the two servants. Several kind bodies had offered to come and stay with her, but she had declined the offers. She was in no mood for company, and perhaps being of such a different race and breed would not have found much comfort in the rough, homely sympathy which was offered to her. She preferred being alone with her grief—grief which after all was bound to be much lightened by the thought of her own approaching happiness, for the day was drawing near when her lover would cross the Border and bear his bonnie bride away. She felt sure that she would not be long alone—that the moment Carriston heard of her aunt's death he would come to her assistance. In such a peaceful, God-fearing neighborhood she had no fear of being left without protection. Moreover, her position in the house was well defined. The old woman, who was childless, had left her niece all of which she died possessed. So Madeline decided to wait quietly until she heard from her lover.

Still there were business matters to be attended to, and at the funeral Mr. Douglas of Callendar, the executor under the will, had suggested that an early interview would be desirable. He offered to drive out to the little farm the next day, but Miss Rowan, who had to see to some feminine

necessaries which could only be supplied by shops, decided that she would come to the town instead of troubling Mr. Douglas to drive so far out.

Madeline, in spite of the superstitious element in her character, was a brave girl, and in spite of her refined style of beauty, strong and healthy. Early hours were the rule in that humble home, so before seven o'clock in the morning she was ready to start on her drive to the little town. At first she thought of taking with her the boy who did the rough outdoor work; but he was busy about something or other, and besides, was a garrulous lad who would be certain to chatter the whole way, and this morning Miss Rowan wanted no companions save her own mingled thoughts of sadness and joy. She knew every inch of the road—she feared no evil—she would be home again long before nightfall—the pony was quiet and sure-footed—so away went Madeline in the strong, primitive vehicle on her lonely twelve miles' drive through the fair scenery.

She passed few people on the road. Indeed, she remembered meeting no one except one or two pedestrian tourists, who like sensible men were doing a portion of their day's task in the early morning. I have no doubt but Miss Rowan seemed to them a passing vision of loveliness.

But when she was a mile or two from Callendar she saw a boy on a pony. The boy, who must have known her by sight, stopped, and handed

her a telegram. She had to pay several shillings for the delivery, or intended delivery, of the message, so far from the station. The boy galloped away, congratulating himself on having been spared a long ride, and Miss Rowan tore open the envelope left in her hands.

The message was brief: "Mr. Carr is seriously ill. Come at once. You will be met in London."

Madeline did not scream or faint. She gave one low moan of pain, set her teeth, and with the face of one in a dream drove as quickly as she could to Callendar, straight to the railway station.

Fortunately—or rather unfortunately—she had money with her, so she did not waste time in going to Mr. Douglas. In spite of the crushing blow she had received the girl had all her wits about her. A train would start in ten minutes' time. She took her ticket, then found an idler outside the station, and paid him to take the pony and carriage back to the farm, with the message as repeated to Carriston.

The journey passed like a long dream. The girl could think of nothing but her lover, dying, dying—perhaps dead before she could reach him. The miles flew by unnoticed; twilight crept on; the carriage grew dark; at last! London at last! Miss Rowan stepped out on the broad platform, not knowing what to do or where to turn. Presently a tall, well-dressed man came up to her, and

◆

removing his hat addressed her by name. The promise as to her being met had been kept.

She clasped her hands. "Tell me—oh, tell me he is not dead," she cried.

"Mr. Carr is not dead. He is ill, very ill—delirious and calling for you."

"Where is he? Oh, take me to him!"

"He is miles and miles from here—at a friend's house. I have been deputed to meet you and to accompany you, if you feel strong enough to continue the journey at once."

"Come," said Madeline. "Take me to him."

"Your luggage?" asked the gentleman.

"I have none. Come!"

"You must take some refreshment."

"I need nothing. Come!"

The gentleman glanced at his watch. "There is just time," he said. He called a cab, told the driver to go at top speed. They reached Paddington just in time to catch the mail.

During the drive across London Madeline asked many questions, and learned from her companion that Mr. Carr had been staying for a day or two at a friend's house in the west of England. That yesterday he had fallen from his horse and sustained such injuries that his life was despaired of. He had been continually calling for Madeline. They had found her address on a letter, and had telegraphed as soon as possible—for which act Miss Rowan thanked her companion with tears in her eyes.



Her conductor did not say much of his own accord, but in replying to her questions he was politely sympathetic. She thought of little outside the fearful picture which filled every corner of her brain, but from her conductor's manner received the impression that he was a medical adviser, who had seen the sufferer, and assisted in the treatment of the case. She did not ask his name, nor did he reveal it.

At Paddington he placed her in a ladies' carriage and left her. He was a smoker, he said. She wondered somewhat at this desertion. Then the train sped down West. At the large stations the gentleman came to her and offered her refreshments. Hunger seemed to have left her, but she accepted a cup of tea once or twice. At last sorrow, fatigue, and the weakness produced by such a prolonged fast had their natural effect. With the tears still on her lashes the girl fell asleep, and must have slept for many miles: a sleep unbroken by stoppages at stations.

Her conductor at last aroused her. He stood at the door of the carriage. "We must get out here," he said. All the momentarily forgotten anguish came back to her as she stood beside him on the almost unoccupied platform.

"Are we there at last?" she asked.

"I am sorry to say we have still a long drive; would you like to rest first?"

"No—no. Come on, if you please." She spoke with feverish eagerness.

The man bowed. "A carriage waits," he said.

Outside the station was a carriage of some sort, drawn by one horse, and driven by a man muffled up to the eyes. It was still night, but Madeline fancied dawn could not be far off. Her conductor opened the door of the carriage and waited for her to enter.

She paused. "Ask him—that man must know if—"

"I am most remiss," said the gentleman. He exchanged a few words with the driver, and coming back, told Madeline that Mr. Carr was still alive, sensible, and expecting her eagerly.

"Oh, please, please drive fast," said the poor girl, springing into the carriage. The gentleman seated himself beside her, and for a long time they drove on in silence. At last they stopped. The dawn was just glimmering. They alighted in front of a house. The door was open. Madeline entered swiftly. "Which way—which way?" she asked. She was too agitated to notice any surroundings; her one wish was to reach her lover.

"Allow me," said the conductor, passing her.

"This way; please follow me." He went up a short flight of stairs, then paused, and opened a door quietly. He stood aside for the girl to enter. The room was dimly lighted, and contained a bed with drawn curtains. Madeline flew past her traveling companion, and, as she threw her-

self on her knees beside the bed upon which she expected to see the helpless and shattered form of the man she loved, heard, or fancied she heard, the door locked behind her.

## VII.

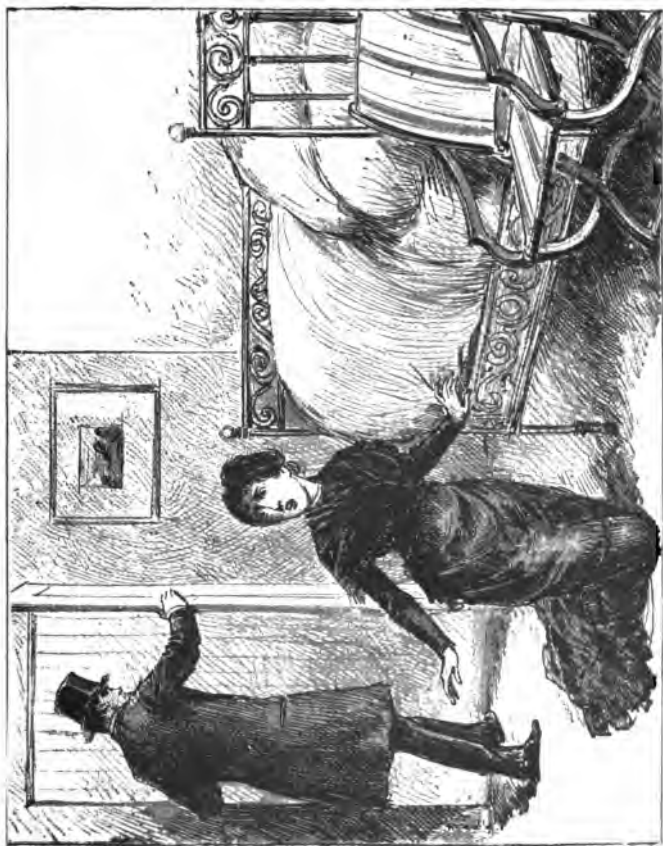
CARRISTON slept on late into the next day. Knowing that every moment of bodily and mental rest was a precious boon to him, I left him undisturbed. He was still fast asleep when, about mid-day, a gentleman called upon me. He sent up no card, and I supposed he came to consult me professionally.

The moment he entered my room I recognized him. He was the thin-lipped, gentlemanly person whom I had met on my journey to Bournemouth last spring—the man who had seemed so much impressed by my views on insanity, and had manifested such interest in the description I had given—without mentioning any name—of Carriston's peculiar mind.

I should have at once claimed acquaintance with my visitor, but before I could speak he advanced, and apologized gracefully for his intrusion.

"You will forgive it," he added, "when I tell you my name is Ralph Carriston."

Remembering our chance conversation, the thought that, after all, Charles Carriston's wild



"MADLINE THREW HERSELF ON HER KNEES BESIDE THE BED."



suspicion was well-founded, flashed through me like lightning. My great hope was that my visitor might not remember my face as I remembered his. I bowed coldly, but said nothing.

"I believe, Dr. Brand," he continued, "you have a young relative of mine at present staying with you?"

"Yes, Mr. Carriston is my guest," I answered. "We are old friends."

"Ah, I did not know that. I do not remember having heard him mention your name as a friend. But as it is so, no one knows better than you do the unfortunate state of his health. How do you find him to-day—violent?"

I pretended to ignore the man's meaning, and answered, smiling, "Violence is the last thing I should look for. He is tired out and exhausted by travel, and is in great distress. That, I believe, is the whole of his complaint."

"Yes, yes, to be sure, poor boy. His sweetheart has left him, or something. But as a doctor you must know that his mental condition is not quite what it should be. His friends are very anxious about him. They fear that a little restraint—temporary, I hope—must be put upon his actions. I called to ask your advice and aid."

"In what, Mr. Carriston?"

"In this. A young man can't be left free to go about threatening his friends' lives. I have brought Dr. Daley with me—you know him, of

course. He is below in my carriage. I will call him up, with your permission. He could then see poor Charles, and the needful certificate could be signed by you two doctors."

"Mr. Carriston," I said, decidedly, "let me tell you in the plainest words that your cousin is at present as fully in possession of his wits as you are. Dr. Daley—whoever he may be—could sign no certificate, and in our day no asylum would dare to keep Mr. Carriston within its walls."

An unpleasant, sinister look crossed my listener's face, but his voice still remained bland and suave. "I am sorry to differ from you, Dr. Brand," he said, "but I know him better than you do. I have seen him as you have never yet seen him. Only last night he came to me in a frantic state. I expected every moment he would make a murderous attack on me."

"Perhaps he fancied he had some reasons for anger," I said.

Ralph Carriston looked at me with those cold eyes of which his cousin had spoken. "If the boy has succeeded in converting you to any of his delusions I can only say that doctors are more credulous than I fancied. But the question is not worth arguing. You decline to assist me, so I must do without you. Good morning, Dr. Brand."

He left the room as gracefully as he had entered it. I remained in a state of doubt. It was curious that Ralph Carriston turned out to be the man

whom I had met in the train ; but the evidence offered by the coincidence was not enough to convict him of the crime of endeavoring to drive his cousin mad by such a far-fetched stratagem as the inveigling away of Madeline Rowan. Besides, even in wishing to prove Charles Carriston mad, he had much to say on his side. Supposing him to be innocent of having abducted Madeline, Carriston's violent behavior on the preceding evening must have seemed very much like insanity. In spite of the aversion with which Ralph Carriston inspired me, I scarcely knew which side to believe.

Carriston still slept: so when I went out on my afternoon rounds I left a note, begging him to remain in the house until my return. Then I found him up, dressed, and looking much more like himself. When I entered, dinner was on the table, so not until that meal was over could we talk unrestrainedly upon the subject which was uppermost in both our minds.

As soon as we were alone I turned toward my guest. "And now," I said, "we must settle what to do. There seems to me to be but one course open. You have plenty of money, so your best plan is to engage skilled police assistance. Young ladies can't be spirited away like this without leaving a trace."

To my surprise Carriston flatly objected to this course. "No," he said, "I shall not go to the police. The man who took her away has placed



her where no police can find her. I must find her myself."

"Find her yourself! Why, it may be months—years—before you do that! Good heavens, Carriston! She may be murdered, or worse—"

"I shall know if any further evil happens to her—Then I shall kill Ralph Carriston."

"But you tell me you have no clew whatever to trace her by. Do talk plainly. Tell me all or nothing."

Carriston smiled very faintly. "No clew that you, at any rate, will believe in," he said. "But I know this much, she is a prisoner somewhere. She is unhappy; but not, as yet, ill-treated. Heavens! Do you think if I did not know this I should keep my senses for an hour?"

"How can you possibly know it?"

"By that gift—that extra sense or whatever it is—which you deride. I knew it would come to me some day, but I little thought how I should welcome it. I know that in some way I shall find her by it. I tell you I have already seen her three times. I may see her again at any moment when the strange fit comes over me."

All this fantastic nonsense was spoken so simply and with such an air of conviction that once more my suspicions as to the state of his mind were aroused. In spite of the brave answers which I had given Mr. Ralph Carriston I felt that common sense was undeniably on his side,

"Tell me what you mean by your strange fit," I said, resolved to find out the nature of Carriston's fancies or hallucinations. "Is it a kind of trance you fall into?"

He seemed loth to give any information on the subject, but I pressed him for an answer.

"Yes," he said at last. "It must be a kind of trance. An indescribable feeling comes over me. I know that my eyes are fixed on some object—presently that object vanishes, and I see Madeline."

"How do you see her?"

"She seems to stand in a blurred circle of light as cast by a magic lantern. That is the only way that I can describe it. But her figure is plain and clear—she might be close to me. The carpet on which she stands I can see, the chair on which she sits, the table on which she leans her hand, any thing she touches I can see, but no more. I have seen her talking. I knew she was entreating some one, but that some one was invisible. Yet, if she touched that person, the virtue of her touch would enable me to see him."

So far as I could see, Carriston's case appeared to be one of over-wrought or unduly stimulated imagination. His I had always considered to be a mind of the most peculiar construction. In his present state of love, grief, and suspense these hallucinations might come in the same way in

which dreams come. For a little while I sat in silence considering how I could best combat with and dispel his remarkable delusions. Before I had arrived at any decision I was called away to see a patient. I was but a short time engaged. Then I returned to Carriston, intending to continue my inquiries.

Upon re-entering the room I found him sitting as I had left him—directly opposite to the door. His face was turned fully toward me, and I trembled as I caught sight of it. He was leaning forward, his hands on the table-cloth, his whole frame rigid, his eyes staring in one direction, yet, I knew, capable of seeing nothing that I could see. He seemed even oblivious to sound, for I entered the room and closed the door behind me, without causing him to change look or position. The moment I saw the man I knew that he had been overtaken by what he called his strange fit.

My first impulse—a natural one—was to arouse him, but second thoughts told me that this was an opportunity for studying his disease which should not be lost—I felt that I could call it by no other name than disease—so I proceeded to make a systematic examination of his symptoms.

I leaned across the table, and with my face about a foot from his, looked straight into his eyes. They betrayed no sign of recognition—no knowledge of my presence. I am ashamed to



"I LIGHTED A TAPER AND HELD IT BEFORE HIS EYES, BUT COULD SEE NO EXPANSION OF THE IRIS."



say I could not divest myself of the impression that they were looking through me. The pupils were greatly dilated. The lids were wide apart. I lighted a taper and held it before them, but could see no expansion of the iris. It was a case, I confess, entirely beyond my comprehension. I had no experience which might serve as a guide as to what was the best course to adopt. All I could do was to stand and watch carefully for any change.

Save for his regular breathing and a sort of convulsive twitching of his fingers, Carriston might have been a corpse or a statue. His face could scarcely grow paler than it had been before the attack. Altogether, it was an uncomfortable sight: a creepy sight—this motionless man, utterly regardless of all that went on around him, and seeing, or giving one the idea that he saw, something far away. I sighed as I looked at the strange spectacle, and foresaw what the end must surely be. But although I longed for him to awake, I determined on this occasion to let the trance, or fit, run its full course, that I might notice in what manner and how soon consciousness returned.

I must have waited and watched some ten minutes—minutes which seemed to be interminable. At last I saw the lips quiver, the lids flicker once or twice, and eventually close wearily over the eyes. The unnatural tension of every muscle

seemed to relax, and, sighing deeply, and apparently quite exhausted, Carrington sank back into his chair with beads of perspiration forming on his white brow. The fit was over.

In a moment I was at his side and forcing a glass of wine down his throat. He looked up at me and spoke. His voice was faint, but his words were quite collected.

"I have seen her again," he said. "She is well ; but so unhappy. I saw her kneel down and pray. She stretched out her beautiful arms to me. And yet I know not where to look for her—my poor love ! my poor love !"

I waited until I thought he had sufficiently recovered from his exhaustion to talk without injurious consequences. "Carriston," I said, "let me ask you one question : are these trances or visions voluntary or not ?"

He reflected for a few moments. "I can't quite tell you," he said ; "or, rather, I would put it in this way. I do not think I can exercise my power at will ; but I can feel when the fit is coming on me, and, I believe, can, if I choose, stop myself from yielding to it."

"Very well. Now listen. Promise me you will fight against these seizures as much as you can. If you don't you will be raving mad in a month."

"I can't promise that," said Carriston, quietly. "See her at times I must, or I shall die. But I

will promise to yield as seldom as may be. I know, as well as you do, that the very exhaustion I now feel must be injurious to any one."

In truth, he looked utterly worn out. Very much dissatisfied with this concession, the best I could get from him, I sent him to bed, knowing that natural rest, if he could get it, would do more than any thing else toward restoring a healthy tone to his mind.

### VIII.

ALTHOUGH Carriston stated that he came to me for aid, and, it may be, protection, he manifested the greatest reluctance in following any advice I offered him. The obstinacy of his refusal to obtain the assistance of the police placed me in a predicament. That Madeline Rowan had really disappeared I was, of course, compelled to believe. It might even be possible that she was kept against her will in some place of concealment. In such a case it behooved us to take proper steps to trace her. Her welfare should not depend upon the hallucinations and eccentric ideas of a man half out of his senses with love and grief. I all but resolved, even at the risk of forfeiting Carriston's friendship, to put the whole matter in the hands of the police, unless, in the course of a day or two, we heard from the girl herself, or Carriston suggested some better plan.



Curiously enough, although refusing to be guided by me, he made no suggestion on his own account. He was racked by fear and suspense, yet his only idea of solving his difficulties seemed to be that of waiting. He did nothing. He simply waited, as if he expected that chance would bring what he should have been searching for high and low.

Some days passed before I could get a tardy consent that aid should be sought. Even then he would not go to the proper quarter; but he allowed me to summon to our councils a man who advertised himself as being a private detective. This man, or one of his men, came at our call, and heard what was wanted of him. Carriston reluctantly gave him one of Madeline's photographs. He also told him that only by watching and spying on Ralph Carriston's every action could he hope to obtain the clew. I did not much like the course adopted, nor did I like the look of the man to whom the inquiry was entrusted; but, at any rate, something was being done.

A week passed without news from our agent. Carriston, in truth, did not seem to expect any. I believe he only employed the man in deference to my wishes. He moved about the house in a disconsolate fashion. I had not told him of my interview with his cousin, but had cautioned him on the rare occasions upon which he went out of

doors to avoid speaking to strangers, and my servants had strict instructions to prevent any one coming in and taking my guest by surprise.

For I had, during those days, opened a confidential inquiry on my own account. I wanted to learn something about this Mr. Ralph Carriston. So I asked a man who knew every body to find out all about him.

He reported that Ralph Carriston was a man well known about London. He was married, and had a house in Dorsetshire; but the greater part of his time was spent in town. Once he was supposed to be well off; but now it was the general opinion that every acre he owned was mortgaged, and that he was much pressed for money. "But," my informant said, "there is but one life between him and the reversion to large estates, and that life is a poor one. I believe even now there is a talk about the man who stands in his way being mad. If so, Ralph Carriston will get the management of every thing."

After this news I felt it more than ever needful to keep a watchful eye on my friend. So far as I knew there had been no recurrence of the trance, and I began to hope that proper treatment would effect a complete cure, when, to my great alarm and annoyance, Carriston, while sitting with me, suddenly and without warning fell into the same strange state of body and mind as previously described. This time he was sitting in

another part of the room. After watching him for a minute or two, and just as I was making up my mind to arouse him and scold him thoroughly for his folly, he sprang to his feet, and shouting, "Let her go! Loose her, I say!" rushed violently across the room—so violently that I had barely time to interpose and prevent him from coming into contact with the opposite wall.

Upon returning to his senses he told me, with great excitement, that he had again seen Madeline; moreover, this time he had seen a man with her—a man who had placed his hand upon her wrist and kept it there; and so, according to Carriston's wild reasoning, became, on account of the contact, visible to him.

He told me he had watched them for some moments, until the man, tightening his grip on the girl's arm, endeavored, he thought, to lead her or induce her to follow him somewhere. At this juncture, unaware that he was gazing at a vision, he had rushed to her assistance in the frantic way I have described—then he awoke.

He also told me he had studied the man's features and general appearance most carefully with a view to future recognition. All these ridiculous statements were made as he made the former ones, with the air of one relating simple, undeniable facts—one speaking the plain, unvarnished truth, and expecting full credence to be given to his words.

It was too absurd! too sad! It was evident to me that the barrier between his hallucinations, dreams, visions, or what he chose to call them, and pure insanity was now a very slight and fragile one. But before I gave his case up as hopeless I determined to make another strong appeal to his common sense. I told him of his cousin's visit to me—of his intentions and proposition. I begged him to consider what consequences his extraordinary beliefs and extravagant actions must eventually entail. He listened attentively and calmly.

"You see now," he said, "how right I was in attributing all this to Ralph Carriston—how right I was to come to you, a doctor of standing, who can vouch for my sanity."

"Vouch for your sanity! How can I when you sit here and talk such arrant nonsense, and expect me to believe it? When you jump from your chair and rush madly at some visionary foe? Sane as you may be in all else, any evidence I could give in your favor must break down in cross-examination if an inkling of these things got about. Come, Carriston, be reasonable, and prove your sanity by setting about this search for Miss Rowan in a proper way."

He made no reply, but walked up and down the room apparently in deep thought. My words seemed to have had no effect upon him. Presently he seated himself; and, as if to avoid re-

turning to the argument, drew a book at hazard from my shelves and began to read. He opened the volume at random, but after reading a few lines seemed struck by something that met his eyes, and in a few minutes was deeply immersed in the contents of the book. I glanced at it to see what had so awakened his interest. By a curious fatality, he had chosen a book the very worst for him in his present frame of mind—Gilchrist's recently published life of William Blake, that masterly memoir of a man who was on certain points as mad as Carriston himself. I was about to remonstrate, when he laid down the volume and turned to me.

"Varley, the painter," he said, "was a firm believer in Blake's visions."

"Varley was a bigger fool than Blake," I retorted. "Fancy his sitting down and watching his clever but mad friend draw spectral heads, and believing them to be genuine portraits of dead kings whose forms condescended to appear to Blake!"

A sudden thought seemed to strike Carriston. "Will you give me some paper and chalk?" he asked. Upon being furnished with these materials he seated himself at the table and began to draw. At least a dozen times he sketched, with his usual rapidity, some object or another, and a dozen times, after a moment's consideration, threw each sketch aside with an air of dis-

appointment and began a fresh one. At last one of his attempts seemed to come up to his requirements. "I have it now, exactly!" he cried, with joy—even triumph—in his voice. He spent some time in putting finishing touches to the successful sketch, then he handed me the paper.

"That is the man I saw just now with Madeline," he said. "When I find him I shall find her." He spoke with all sincerity and conviction. I looked at the paper with, I am bound to say, a great amount of curiosity.

No matter from what visionary source Carriston had drawn his inspiration, his sketch was vigorous and natural enough. I have already mentioned his wonderful power of drawing portraits from memory, so was willing to grant that he might have reproduced the outline of some face which had somewhere struck him. Yet why should it have been this one? His drawing represented the three-quarter face of a man—an ordinary man—apparently between forty and fifty years of age. It was a coarse-featured, ill-favored face, with a ragged ruff of hair round the chin. It was not the face of a gentleman, nor even the face of a gently-nurtured man; and the artist, by a few cunning strokes, had made it wear a crafty and sullen look. The sketch, as I write this, lies before me, so that I am not speaking from memory.

Now, there are some portraits of which, without having seen the original, we say, "What splendid likenesses these must be." It was so with Carriston's sketch. Looking at it, you felt sure it was exactly like the man whom it was intended to represent. So that, with the certain amount of art knowledge which I am at least supposed to possess, it was hard for me, after examining the drawing and recognizing the true artist's touch in every line, to bring myself to accept the fact that it was but the outcome of a diseased imagination. As, at this very moment, I glance at that drawing, I scarcely blame myself for the question that faintly frames itself in my innermost heart. "Could it be possible—could there be in certain organizations powers not yet known—not yet properly investigated?"

My thought—supposing such a thought was ever there—was not discouraged by Carriston, who, speaking as if his faith in the bodily existence of the man whose portrait lay in my hand was unassailable, said,

"I noticed that his general appearance was that of a countryman—an English peasant; so in the country I shall find my love. Moreover, it will be easy to identify the man, as the top joint is missing from the middle finger of his right hand. As it lay on Madeline's arm I noticed that."

I argued with him no more. I felt that words would be but wasted.

## IX.

A DAY or two after I had witnessed what I must call Carriston's second seizure we were favored with a visit from the man whose services we had secured to trace Madeline. Since he had received his instructions we had heard nothing of his proceedings until he now called to report progress in person. Carriston had not expressed the slightest curiosity as to where the man was or what he was about. Probably he looked upon the employment of this private detective as nothing more useful than a salve to my conscience. That Madeline was only to be found through the power which he professed to hold of seeing her in his visions was, I felt certain, becoming a rooted belief of his. Whenever I expressed my surprise that our agent had brought or sent no information, Carriston shrugged his shoulders, and assured me that from the first he knew the man's researches would be fruitless. However, the fellow had called at last, and, I hoped, had brought us good news.

He was a glib-tongued man, who spoke in a confident, matter-of-fact way. When he saw us he rubbed his hands as one who had brought affairs to a successful issue and now meant to reap praise and other rewards. His whole bearing told me he had made an important discovery; so I begged him to be seated, and give us his news.



Carriston gave him a careless glance, and stood at some little distance from us. He looked as if he thought the impending communication scarcely worth the trouble of listening to. He might, indeed, from his looks, have been the most disinterested person of the three. He even left me to do the questioning.

"Now, then, Mr. Sharpe," I said, "let us hear if you have earned your money."

"I think so, sir," replied Sharpe, looking curiously at Carriston, who, strange to say, heard this answer with supreme indifference.

"I think I may say I have, sir," continued the detective—"that is, if the gentleman can identify these articles as being the young lady's property."

Thereupon he produced from a thick letter-case a ribbon in which was stuck a silver pin, mounted with Scotch pebbles, an ornament that I remembered having seen Madeline wear. Mr. Sharpe handed them to Carriston. He examined them, and I saw his cheeks flush and his eyes grow bright.

"How did you come by this?" he cried, pointing to the silver ornament.

"I'll tell you presently, sir. Do you recognize it?"

"I gave it to Miss Rowan myself."

"Then we are on the right track," I cried, joyfully. "Go on, Mr. Sharpe."

"Yes, gentlemen, we are certainly on the right

track; but after all, it isn't my fault if the track don't lead exactly where you wish. You see, when I heard of this mysterious disappearance of the lady I began to concoct my own theory. I said to myself, when a young and beautiful—"

"Damn your theories!" cried Carriston, fiercely. "Go on with your tale."

The man gave his interrupter a spiteful glance.

"Well, sir," he said, "as you gave me strict instructions to watch a certain gentleman closely, I obeyed these instructions, of course, although I knew I was on a fool's errand."

"Will you go on?" cried Carriston. "If you know where Miss Rowan is, say so; your money will be paid you the moment I find her."

"I don't say I know exactly where to find the lady, but I can soon know if you wish me to."

"Tell your tale your own way, but as shortly as possible," I said, seeing that my excitable friend was preparing for another outburst.

"I found there was nothing to be gained by keeping watch on the gentleman you mentioned, sir, so I went to Scotland and tried back from there. As soon as I worked on my own lay I found out all about it. The lady went from Calendar to Edinburgh, from Edinburgh to London, from London to Folkestone, and from Folkestone to Boulong."

I glanced at Carriston. All his calmness seemed to have returned. He was leaning against the

mantle-piece, and appeared quite unmoved by Mr. Sharpe's clear statement as to the route Madeline had taken.

"Of course," continued Mr. Sharpe, "I was not quite certain I was tracking the right person, although her description corresponded with the likeness you gave me. But as you are sure this article of jew'ry belonged to the lady you want, the matter is beyond a doubt."

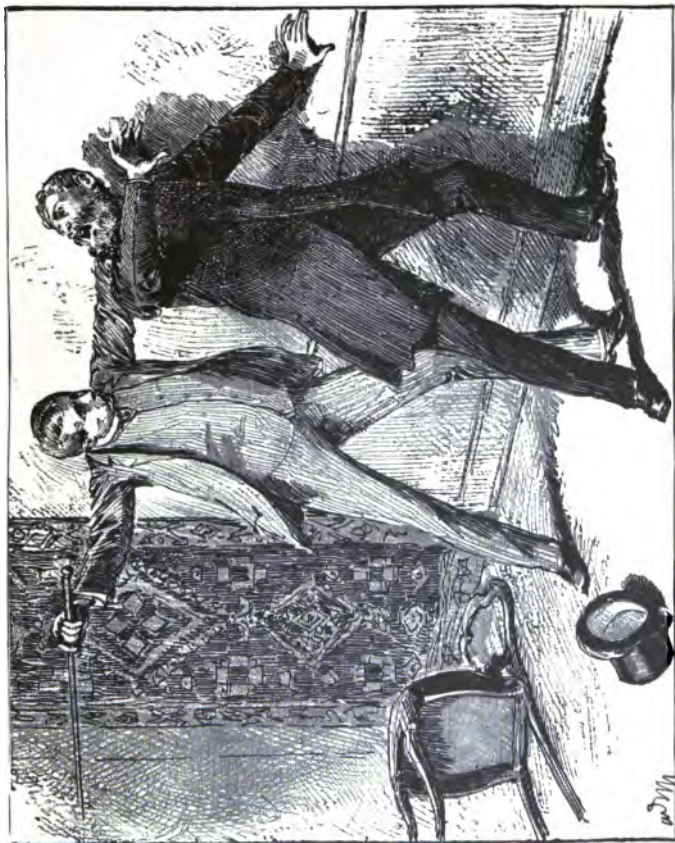
"Of course," I said, seeing that Carriston had no intention of speaking. "Where did you find it?"

"It was left behind in a bedroom of one of the principal hotels in Folkestone. I did go over to Boulong, but after that I thought I had learned all you would care to know."

There was something in the man's manner which made me dread what was coming. Again I looked at Carriston. His lips were curved with contempt, but he still kept silence.

"Why not have pursued your inquiries past Boulong?" I asked.

"For this reason, sir. I had learned enough. The theory I had concocted was the right one, after all. The lady went to Edinburgh alone, right enough; but she didn't leave Edinburgh alone, nor she didn't leave London alone, nor she didn't stay at Folkestone—where I found the pin—alone, nor she didn't go to Boulong alone. She was accompanied by a young gentleman who called



**"CARRISTON THRASHED THE MAN VIGOROUSLY WITH HIS OWN ASH STICK."**



himself Mr. Smith; and, what's more, she called herself Mrs. Smith. Perhaps she was, as they lived like man and wife."

Whether the fellow was right or mistaken, this explanation of Madeline's disappearance seemed to give me what I can only compare to a smack in the face. I stared at the speaker in speechless astonishment. If the tale he told so glibly and circumstantially was true, farewell, so far as I was concerned, to belief in the love or purity of women. Madeline Rowan, that creature of a poet's dream, on the eve of her marriage with Charles Carriston, to fly, whether wed or unwed mattered little, with another man! And yet, she was but a woman. Carriston—or Carr, as she only knew him—was in her eyes poor. The companion of her flight might have won her with gold. Such things have been. Still—

My rapid and wrongful meditations were cut short in an unexpected way. Suddenly I saw Mr. Sharpe dragged bodily out of his chair and thrown on to the floor, while Carriston, standing over him, thrashed the man vigorously with his own ash stick—a convenient weapon, so convenient, that I felt Mr. Sharpe could not have selected a stick more appropriate for his own chastisement. So Carriston seemed to think, for he laid on cheerfully some eight or ten good cutting strokes.

Nevertheless, being a respectable doctor and

man of peace, I was compelled to interfere. I held Carriston's arm while Mr. Sharpe struggled to his feet, and after collecting his hat and his pocket-book, stood glaring vengefully at his assailant, and rubbing the while such of the weals on his back as he could reach. Annoyed as I felt at the unprofessional *fracas*, I could scarcely help laughing at the man's appearance. I doubt the possibility of any one looking heroic after such a thrashing.

"I'll have the law for this," he growled. "I ain't paid to be beaten by a madman."

"You're paid to do my work, not another's," said Carriston. "Go to the man who has overbribed you and sent you to tell me your lies—go to him, tell him that once more he has failed. Out of my sight."

As Carriston showed signs of re-commencing hostile operations, the man fled as far as the doorway. There, being in comparative safety, he turned with a malignant look.

"You'll smart for this," he said; "when they lock you up as a raving lunatic I'll try and get a post as keeper."

I was glad to see that Carriston paid no attention to this parting shaft. He turned his back scornfully, and the fellow left the room and the house.

"Now are you convinced?" asked Carriston, turning to me.

"Convinced of what? That his tale is untrue, or that he has been misled, I am quite certain of."

"Tush! That is not worth consideration. Don't you see that Ralph has done all this? I set that man to watch him; he found out the espionage; suborned my agent, or your agent, I should say; sent him here with a trumped-up tale. Oh yes; I was to believe that Madeline had deserted me—that was to drive me out of my senses. My cousin is a fool, after all!"

"Without further proof I can not believe that your suspicions are correct," I said; but I must own I spoke with some hesitation.

"Proof! A clever man like you ought to see ample proof in the fact of that wretch having twice called me a madman. I have seen him but once before—you know if then I gave him any grounds for making such an assertion. Tell me, from whom could he have learned the word except from Ralph Carriston?"

I was bound, if only to save my own reputation for sagacity, to confess that the point noted by Carriston had raised certain doubts in my mind. But if Ralph Carriston really was trying by some finely wrought scheme to bring about what he desired, there was all the more reason for great caution to be exercised.

"I am sorry you beat the fellow," I said. "He will now swear right and left that you are not in your senses."



"Of course he will. What do I care?"

"Only remember this. It is easier to get put in an asylum than to get out of it."

"It is not so very easy for a sane man like myself to be put in, especially when he is on his guard. I have looked up the law. There must be a certificate signed by two doctors, surgeons, or, I believe, apothecaries will do, who have seen the supposed lunatic alone and together. I'll take very good care I speak to no doctor save yourself, and keep out of the way of surgeons and apothecaries."

It quite cheered me to hear him speaking so sensibly and collectedly about himself, but I again impressed upon him the need of great caution. Although I could not believe that his cousin had taken Madeline away, I was, after the affair with the spy, inclined to think that, as Carriston averred, he aimed at getting him, sane or insane, into a mad-house.

But after all these days we were not a step nearer to the discovery of Madeline's whereabouts. Carriston made no sign of doing any thing to facilitate that discovery. Again I urged him to intrust the whole affair to the police. Again he refused to do so, adding that he was not quite ready. Ready for what, I wondered!

## X.

I MUST confess, in spite of my affection for Carriston, I felt inclined to rebel against the course which matters were taking. I was a prosaic, matter-of-fact medical man; doing my work to the best of my ability, and anxious when that work was done that my hours of leisure should be as free from worry and care as possible. With Carriston's advent several disturbing elements entered into my quiet life.

Let Ralph Carriston be guilty or innocent of the extraordinary crime which his cousin laid at his door, I felt certain that he was anxious to obtain possession of the supposed lunatic's person. It would suit his purposes for his cousin to be proved mad. I did not believe that even if the capture was legally effected, Carriston's liberation would be a matter of great difficulty so long as he remained in his present state of mind; so long as I, a doctor of some standing, could go into the witness box and swear to his sanity. But my old dread was always with me—the dread that any further shock would overturn the balance of his sensitive mind.

So it was that every hour that Carriston was out of my sight was fraught with anxiety. If Ralph Carriston was really as unscrupulous as my friend supposed; if he had really, as seemed

almost probable, suborned our agent, he might by some crafty trick obtain the needful certificate, and some day I should come home and find Carriston had been removed. In such a case I foresaw great trouble and distress.

Besides, after all that had occurred, it was as much as I could do to believe that Carriston was not mad. Any doctor who knew what I knew would have given the verdict against him.

After dismissing his visions and hallucinations with the contempt which they deserved, the fact of a man who was madly, passionately in love with a woman, and who believed that she had been entrapped and was still kept in restraint, sitting down quietly, and letting day after day pass without making an effort toward finding her, was in itself *prima facie* evidence of insanity. A sane man would at once have set all the engines of detection at work.

I felt that if once Ralph Carriston obtained possession of him he could make out a strong case in his own favor. First of all, the proposed marriage out of the defendant's own sphere of life; the passing under a false name; the ridiculous, or apparently ridiculous, accusation made against his kinsman; the murderous threats; the chastisement of his own paid agent who brought him a report which might not seem at all untrue to any one who knew not Madeline Rowan. Leaving out of the question what might be wrung from

me in cross-examination, Ralph Carriston had a strong case, and I knew that, once in his power, my friend might possibly be doomed to pass years, if not his whole life, under restraint. So I was anxious, very anxious.

And I felt an anxiety, scarcely second to that which prevailed on Carriston's account, as to the fate of Madeline. Granting, for sake of argument, that Carriston's absurd conviction that no bodily harm had as yet been done her was true, I felt sure that she, with her scarcely less sensitive nature, must feel the separation from her lover as much as he himself felt the separation from her. Once or twice I tried to comfort myself with cynicism—tried to persuade myself that a young woman could not in our days be spirited away—that she had gone of her own free will—that there was a man who had at the eleventh hour alienated her affections from Carriston. But I could not bring myself to believe this. So I was placed between the horns of a dilemma.

If Madeline had not fled of her own free will, some one must have taken her away, and if so, our agent's report was a coined one, and, if a coined one, issued at Ralph's instance; therefore, Ralph must be the prime actor in the mystery.

But in sober moments such a deduction seemed an utter absurdity.

Although I have said that Carriston was doing nothing toward clearing up the mystery, I wrong

him in so saying. After his own erratic way, he was at work. At such work too! I really lost all patience with him.

He shut himself up in his room, out of which he scarcely stirred for three days. By that time he had completed a large and beautiful drawing of his imaginary man. This he took to a well-known photographer's, and ordered several hundred small photographs of it to be prepared as soon as possible. The minute description which he had given me of his fanciful creation was printed at the foot of each copy. As soon as the first batch of these precious photographs was sent home, to my great joy he did what he should have done days ago: yielded to my wishes, and put the matter into the hands of the police.

I was glad to find that in giving details of what had happened he said nothing about the advisability of keeping a watch on Ralph Carriston's proceedings. He did indeed offer an absurdly large reward for the discovery of the missing girl, and, moreover, gave the officer in charge of the case a packet of photographs of his phantom man, telling him in the gravest manner that he knew the original of that likeness had something to do with the disappearance of Miss Rowan. The officer, who thought the portrait was that of a natural being, took his instructions in good faith, although he seemed greatly surprised when he heard that Carriston knew neither the name

nor the occupation, in fact, knew nothing concerning the man who was to be sought for. However, as Carriston assured him that finding this man would insure the reward as much as if he found Madeline, the officer readily promised to combine the two tasks, little knowing what waste of time any attempt to perform the latter must be.

Two days after this Carriston came to me. "I shall leave you to-morrow," he said.

"Where are you going?" I asked. "Why do you leave?"

"I am going to travel about. I have no intention of letting Ralph get hold of me. So I mean to go from place to place until I find Madeline."

"Be careful," I urged.

"I shall be careful enough. I'll take care that no doctors, surgeons, or even apothecaries get on my track. I shall go just as the fit seizes me. If I can't say one day where I shall be the next, it will be impossible for that villain to know."

This was not a bad argument. In fact, if he carried out his resolve of passing quickly from place to place I did not see how he could plan anything more likely to defeat the intentions with which we credited his cousin. As to his finding Madeline by so doing, that was another matter.

His idea seemed to be that chance would sooner or later bring him in contact with the man of his dream. However, now that the search had been

intrusted to the proper persons his own action in the matter was not worth troubling about. I gave him many cautions. He was to be quiet and guarded in words and manner. He was not to converse with strangers. If he found himself dogged or watched by any, he was to communicate at once with me. But, above all, I begged him not to yield again to his mental infirmity. The folly of a man who could avoid it throwing himself into such a state ought to be apparent to him.

"Not oftener than I can help," was all the promise I could get from him. "But see her I must sometimes, or I shall die."

I had now given up the combat with his peculiar idiosyncrasy as hopeless. So, with many expressions of gratitude on his part, we bade each other farewell.

During his absence he wrote me nearly every day, so that I might know his whereabouts in case I had any news to communicate. But I had none. The police failed to find the slightest clew. I had been called upon by them once or twice in order that they might have every grain of information I could give. I took the liberty of advising them not to waste their time in looking for the man, as his very existence was problematical. It was but a fancy of my friend's, and not worth thinking seriously about. I am not sure but that after hearing this they did not think the whole affair

was an imagined one, and so relaxed their efforts.

Once or twice Carriston happening to be in the neighborhood of London, came to see me, and slept the night at my house. He also had no news to report. Still, he seemed hopeful as ever.

The weeks went by until Christmas was over and the New Year begun ; but no sign, word, or trace of Madeline Rowan. "I have seen her," wrote Carriston, "several times. She is in the same place—unhappy, but not ill treated."

Evidently his hallucinations were still in full force.

At first I intended that the whole of this tale should be told by myself ; but upon getting so far it struck me that the evidence of another actor, who played an important part in the drama would give certain occurrences to the reader at first instead of at second-hand, so I wrote to my friend Dick Fenton, of Frenchay, Gloucestershire, and begged him, if he found himself capable of so doing, to put in simple narrative form his impressions of certain events which happened in January, 1866—events in which we two were concerned. He has been good enough to comply with my request. His communication follows.



## PART II.

TOLD BY RICHARD FENTON, OF FRENCHAY,  
GLOUCESTERSHIRE, ESQUIRE.

## I.

AS my old friend Phil Brand has asked me to do this I suppose I must—Brand is a right good fellow, and a clever fellow, but has plenty of crotchets of his own. The worst I know of him is that he insists upon having his own way with people. With those who differ from him he is as obstinate as a mule. Anyhow, he has always had his own way with me. This custom, so far as I am concerned, commenced years ago, when we were boys at school together, and I have never been able to shake off the bad habit of giving in to him. He has promised to see that my Queen's English is presentable; for, to tell the truth, I am more at home across country than across foolscap, and my fingers know the feel of the reins or the trigger better than that of the pen.

All the same I hope he won't take too many liberties with my style, bad though it may be; for old Brand at times is apt to get—well, a bit prosy. To hear him on the subject of hard work and the sanctity thereof approaches the sublime!

What freak took me to the little God-forsaken village of Midcombe in the depth of winter is entirely between myself and my conscience. The cause, having no bearing upon the matters I am asked to tell you about, is no one's business but mine—I will only say that now I would not stay in such a place at such a time of the year for the sake of the prettiest girl in the world, let alone the bare chance of meeting her once or twice. But one's ideas change. I am now a good bit older, ride some two stone heavier, and have been married ever so many years. Perhaps, after all, as I look back I can find some excuse for being such an ass as to endure for more than a fortnight all the discomforts heaped upon me in that little village inn.

A man who sojourns in such a hole as Midcombe must give some reason for doing so. My ostensible reason was hunting. I had a horse with me, and a second-rate subscription pack of slow-going mongrels did meet somewhere in the neighborhood, so no one could gainsay my explanation. But if hunting was my object, I got precious little of it. A few days after my arrival a bitter, biting frost set in—a frost as black as your hat, and as hard as nails. Yet still I staid on.

From private information received—no matter how, when, or where—I knew that some people in the neighborhood had organized a party to go skating on a certain day at Lilymere, a fine sheet

of water some distance from Midcombe. I guessed that some one whom I particularly desired to meet would be there, and as the skating at Lilymere was free to any one who chose to take the trouble of getting to such an out of the way place, I hired a horse and an apology for a dog cart, and at ten in the morning started to drive the twelve miles to the pond. I took no one with me. I had been to Lilymere once before, in bright summer weather, so fancied I knew the way well enough.

The sky when I started was cloudy; the wind was chopping round in a way which made the effete rustic old hostler predict a change of weather. He was right. Before I had driven two miles light snow began to fall, and by the time I reached a wretched little wayside inn, about a mile from the Mere, a film of white covered the whole country. I stabled my horse as well as I could, then, taking my skates with me, walked down to the pond.

Now, whether I had mistaken the day, or whether the threatening fall of snow had made certain people change their minds, I don't know; but to my annoyance and vexation, no skaters were to be seen, and, moreover, the uncut, white surface told me that none had been on the pond that morning. Still, hoping they might come in spite of the weather, I put on my skates and went outside-edging and grape-vining all over the place. But as there was no person in particular—in fact, no one at all—to note my powers, I soon got tired.

It was indeed dreary, dreary work. But I waited and hoped until the snow came down so fast and furiously, that I felt sure that waiting was in vain, and that I had driven to Lylymere for nothing.

Back I went to the little inn, utterly disgusted with things in general, and feeling that to break some one's head would be a relief to me in my present state of mind. Of course a sensible man would at once have got his horse between the shafts and driven home. But whatever I may be now, in those days I was not a sensible man—Brand will, I know, cordially indorse this remark. The accommodation of the inn was not such as to induce one to linger within its precincts; but the fire was a right good one, and a drink, which I skillfully manufactured out of some hot beer, was not to be despised, and proved warming to the body and soothing to the ruffled temper. So I lingered over the big fire until I began to feel hungry, and upon the landlady assuring me that she could cook a rasher, decided it would be wiser to stay where I was until the violence of the snow-storm was over; for coming down it was now, and no mistake!

And it kept on coming down. About half past three, when I sorrowfully decided I was bound to make a move, it was snowing faster than ever. I harnessed my horse, and laughing at the old woman's dismal prophecy that I should never get

to Midcombe in such weather, gathered up the reins, and away I went along the white road.

I thought I knew the way well enough. In fact, I had always prided myself upon remembering any road once driven over by me; but does any one who has not tried it really know how a heavy fall of snow changes the aspect of the country, and makes landmarks snares and delusions? I learned all about it then, once and for all. I found, also, the snow lay much deeper than I thought could possibly be in so short a time, and it still fell in a manner almost blinding. Yet I went on bravely and merrily for some miles. Then came a bit of uncertainty—

Which of those two roads was the right one? This one, of course—no, the other. There was no house near; no one was likely to be passing in such weather, so I was left to exercise my free, unbiassed choice—a privilege I would willingly have dispensed with. However, I made the best selection I could, and followed it for some two miles. Then I began to grow doubtful, and soon persuading myself that I was on the wrong track, retraced my steps. I was by this time something like a huge white plaster-of-Paris figure, and the snow which had accumulated on the old dog-cart made it run heavier by half a ton, more or less. By the time I came to that unlucky juncture of roads at which my misfortunes began, it was almost dark; the sky as black as a tarpaulin, yet

sending down the white, feathery flakes thicker and faster than ever. I felt inclined to curse my folly in attempting such a drive; at any rate I blamed myself for not having started two or three hours earlier. I'll warrant that steady-going old Brand never had to accuse himself of such foolishness as mine.

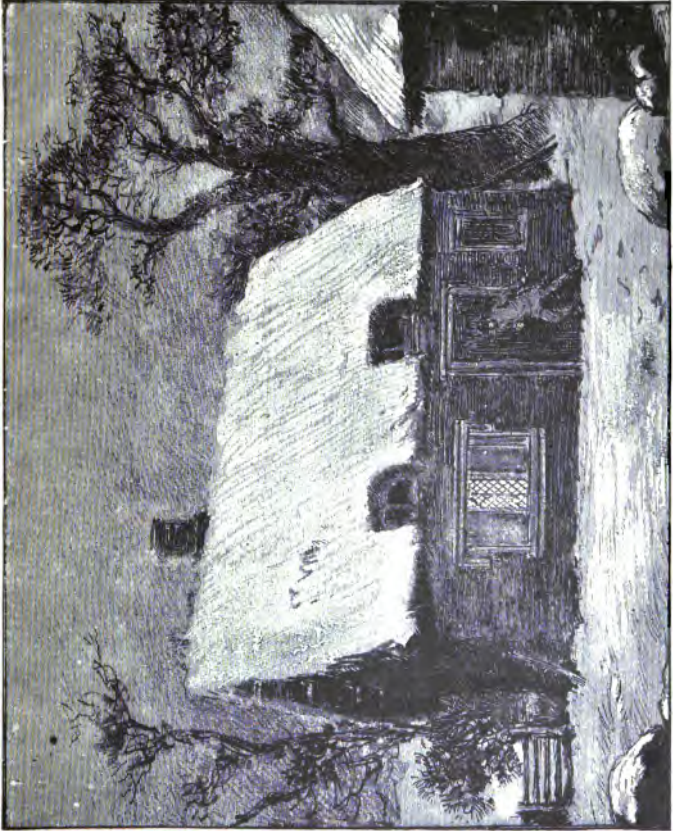
Well, I took the other road, went on some way; came to a turning which I seemed to remember, and, not without my misgivings, followed it. My misgivings increased when, after a little while, I found the road grew full of ruts, which the snow and the darkness quite concealed from me until the wheels got into them. Evidently I was wrong again. I was thinking of making the best of my way out of this rough and unfrequented road, when—there, I don't know how it happened, such things seldom occur to me—a stumble, a fall on the part of my tired horse sent me flying over the dash-board, with the only consoling thought that the reins were still in my hand.

Luckily the snow had made the falling pretty soft. I soon picked myself up and set about estimating damages. With some difficulty I got the horse out of the harness and then felt free to inspect the dog-cart. Alas! after the manner of the two-wheel kind whenever a horse thinks fit to fall, one shaft had snapped off like a carrot; so here was I, five miles apparently from anywhere, in the thick of a blinding snow-storm, left stand-

ing helpless beside a jaded horse and a broken cart—I should like to know what Brand would have done under the circumstances.

As for me, I reflected for some minutes—reflection in a snow-storm is weary work. I reasoned, I believe, logically, and at last came to this decision: I would follow the road. If, as I suspected, it was but a cart track, it would probably soon lead to a habitation of some kind. Anyway, I had better try a bit further. I took hold of the wearied horse, and with snow under my feet, snowflakes whirling round me, and a wind blowing right into my teeth, struggled on.

It was a journey! I think I must have been three-quarters of an hour going about a quarter of a mile. I was just beginning to despair, when I saw a welcome gleam of light. I steered toward it, fondly hoping that my troubles were at an end. I found the light stole through the ill-fitting window-shutters of what seemed, so far as I could make out in the darkness, to be a small farmhouse. Tying to a gate the knotted reins by which I had been leading the horse, I staggered up to the door and knocked loudly. Upon my honor, until I leaned against the door-post I had no idea how tired I was—until that moment I never suspected that the finding of speedy shelter meant absolutely saving my life. Covered from head to foot with snow, my hat crushed in, I must have been a pitiable object.



"I STAGGERED UP TO THE DOOR AND KNOCKED LOUDLY."





No answer came to my first summons. It was only after a second and more imperative application of my heel that the door deigned to give way a few inches. Through the aperture a woman's voice asked who was there.

"Let me in," I said. "I haved missed my way to Midcombe. My horse has fallen. You must give me shelter for the night. Open the door, and let me in."

"Shelter! You can't get sheltered here, mister," said a man's gruff voice. "This ain't an inn, so you'd best be off, and go elsewhere."

"But I must come in," I said, astounded at such inhospitality; "I can't go a step further. Open the door at once!"

"You be d—d," said the man. "'Tis my house, not yours."

"But, you fool, I mean to pay you well for your trouble. Don't you know it means death wandering about on such a night as this? Let me in!"

"You won't come in here," was the brutal and boorish reply. The door closed.

That I was enraged at such incivility may be easily imagined; but if I said I was thoroughly frightened I believe no one would be surprised. As getting into that house meant simply life or death to me, into that house I determined to get, by door or window, by fair means or foul. So, as the door closed, I hurled myself against it with

all the might I could muster. Although I ride much heavier now than I did then, all my weight at that time was bone and muscle. The violence of my attack tore from the lintel the staple which held the chain; the door went back with a bang, and I fell forward into the house, fully resolved to stay there whether welcome or unwelcome.

## II.

THE door through which I had burst like a battering-ram opened straight into a sort of kitchen, so although I entered in a most undignified way, in fact on my hands and knees, I was well-established in the center of the room before the man and woman emerged from behind the door, where my successful assault had thrown them. I stood up and faced them. They were a couple of ordinary, respectably attired country people. The man—a sturdy, strong-built, bull-necked rascal—stood scowling at me, and, I concluded, making up his mind as to what course to pursue.

“My good people,” I said, “you are behaving in the most unheard-of manner. Can’t you understand that I mean to pay you well for any trouble I give you? But whether you like it or not, here I stay to-night. To turn me out would be sheer murder.”

So saying I pulled off my overcoat, and began shaking the snow out of my whiskers,

I dare say my determined attitude, my respectable, as well as muscular appearance, impressed my unwilling hosts. Any way, they gave in without more ado. While the woman shut the door, through which the snow-flakes were whirling, the man said, sullenly,

“Well, you’ll have to spend the night on a chair. We’ve no beds here for strangers. ‘Specially those as ain’t wanted.”

“Very well, my friend. Having settled the matter, you may as well make yourself pleasant. Go out and put my horse under cover, and give him a feed of some sort—make a mash if you can.”

After giving the woman a quick glance as of warning, my scowling host lighted a horn lantern and went on the errand I suggested. I gladly sank into a chair, and warmed myself before a cheerful fire. The prospect of spending the night amid such discomfort was not alluring, but I had at least a roof over my head.

The more churlish the nature, the more avaricious it is, as a rule, found to be. My promise of liberal remuneration was, after all, not without its effect upon the strange couple whose refusal to afford me refuge had so nearly endangered my life. They condescended to get me some tea and rough food. After I had disposed of all that, the man produced a bottle of gin. We filled our glasses, and then, with the aid of my pipe, I set-

tled down to make the best of a night spent in a hard wooden chair.

I had come across strange people in my travels, but I have no hesitation in saying that my host was the sullenest, sulkiest, most boorish specimen of human nature I had as yet met with. In spite of his recent ill-treatment of me, I was quite ready to establish matters on a friendly footing, and made several attempts to draw him into conversation. The brute would only answer in monosyllables, or often not answer at all. So I gave up talking as a bad job, and sat in silence, smoking and looking into the fire, thinking a good deal, it may be, of some one I should have met that morning at Lylymere, had the wretched snow but kept off.

The long clock—that cumbrous eight-day machine which inevitably occupies one corner of every cottager's kitchen—struck nine. The woman rose and left us. I concluded she was going to bed. If so I envied her. Her husband showed no signs of retiring. He still sat over the fire, opposite me. By this time I was dreadfully tired: every bone in my body ached. The hard chair which, an hour or two ago, seemed all I could desire, now scarcely came up to my ideas of the comfort I was justly entitled to claim. My sulky companion had been drinking silently but steadily. Perhaps the liquor he had poured into himself might have rendered his frame of mind more pleasant and amenable to reason.

"My good fellow," I said, "your chairs are excellent ones of the kind, but deucedly uncomfortable. I am horribly tired. If the resources of your establishment can't furnish a bed for me to sleep in, couldn't you find a mattress or something to lay down before the fire?"

"You've got all you'll get to-night," he answered, knocking the ashes out of his pipe.

"Oh, but I say!"

"So do I say. I say this: if you don't like it you can leave it. We didn't ask you to come."

"You infernal beast," I muttered—and meant it too. I declare had I not been so utterly worn out, I would have had that bullet-headed ruffian up for a few rounds on his own kitchen floor, and tried to knock him into a more amiable frame of mind.

"Never mind," I said, "but remember, civility costs nothing, and often gets rewarded. However, if you wish to retire to your own couch, don't let your native politeness stand in your way. Pray don't hesitate on my account. Leave plenty of fuel, and I shall manage until the morning."

"Where you stay, I stay," he answered. Then he filled his pipe, and once more relapsed into stony silence.

I bothered about him no more. I dozed off for a few minutes—woke—dozed off again for some hours. I was in an uncomfortable sort of half

sleep, crammed full of curious dreams—dreams from which I started, wondering where I was and how I got there. I even began to grow nervous. All sorts of horrible travelers' tales ran through my head. It was in just such places as this that unsuspecting voyagers were stated to have been murdered and robbed, by just such unmitigated ruffians as my host—I can tell you that altogether I spent a most pleasant night.

To make matters worse and more dismal, the storm still raged outside. The wind moaned through the trees, but it had again changed, and I knew from the sound of the window-panes that heavy rain had succeeded snow. As the big drops of water found their way down the large, old-fashioned chimney, the fire hissed and spluttered like a spiteful vixen. Every thing combined to deprive me of what dog's sleep I could, by sheer persistency, snatch.

I think I tried every position which an ordinary man, not an acrobat, is capable of adopting with the assistance of a common wooden chair. I even lay down on the hard flags. I actually tried the table. I propped up the upper half of my body against the corner walls of the room, but found no rest. At last I gave up all idea of sleeping, and fully aroused myself. I comforted myself by saying that my misery was only temporary—that the longest night must come to an end.

My companion had now succumbed to fatigue, or to the combined effects of fatigue and gin-and-water. His head was hanging sideways, and he slept in a most uncomfortable attitude. I chuckled as I looked at him, feeling quite sure that if such a clod was capable of dreaming at all, his dreams must be worse even than mine. I filled another pipe, poked the smoldering logs into a blaze, and sat almost nose and knees over the fire, finding some amusement in speculating upon the condition of the churl before me, and thanking the Lord I was not like unto this man. Suddenly an idea flashed across me.

I had seen this fellow before. But when or where I could not remember. His features, as I looked at them with keener interest, seemed to grow more and more familiar to me. Where could I have met him? Somewhere or other, but where? I racked my brain to associate him with some scene—some event. Although he was but an ordinary countryman, such as one sees scores of in a day's ride, only differing from his kind on account of his unpleasant face, I felt sure we were old acquaintances. When he awoke for a moment and changed his strained attitude, my feeling grew stronger and stronger. Yet puzzle and puzzle as I would, I could not call to mind a former encounter; so at last I began to think the supposed recognition was purely fancy on my part.



Having smoked out several pipes, I thought that a cigar would be a slight break to the monotony of the night's proceedings. So I drew out my case and looked at its contents. Among the weeds was one of a lighter color than the others. As I took it out I said to myself, "Why, old Brand gave me that one when I was last at his house." Curiously enough, that cigar was the missing link in the chain of my memory. As I held it in my hand I knew at once why my host's ugly face seemed familiar to me.

About a fortnight before, being in town, I had spent the evening with the doctor. He was not alone, and I was introduced to a tall, pale young man named Carriston. He was a pleasant, polite young fellow, although not much in my line. At first I judged him to be a would-be poet of the fashionable miserable school; but finding that he and Brand talked so much about art, I eventually decided that he was one of the doctor's many artist friends. Art is a hobby he hacks about on grandly. (Mem. Brand's own attempts at pictures are simply atrocious!)

Just before I left, Carriston, the doctor's back being turned, asked me to step into another room. There he showed me the portrait of a man. It seemed very cleverly drawn, and I presumed he wanted me to criticise it.

"I am a precious bad judge," I said.

"I am not asking you to pass an opinion," said



"I CAREFULLY COMPARED THE PHOTO WITH THE SLEEPER."



Carriston. "I want to beg a favor of you. I am almost ashamed to beg it on so short an acquaintance."

He seemed modest, and not in want of money, so I encouraged him to proceed.

"I heard you say you were going into the country," he resumed. "I want to ask you if by any chance you should meet the original of that drawing, to telegraph at once to Dr. Brand."

"Whereabouts does he live?"

"I have no idea. If chance throws him in your way, please do as I ask."

"Certainly I will," I said, seeing the young man made the request in solemn earnest.

He thanked me, and then gave me a small photograph of the picture. This photograph he begged me to keep in my pocket-book, so that I might refer to it in case I met the man he wanted. I put it there, went my way, and, am sorry to say, forgot all about it. Had it not been for the strange cigar in my case bringing back Carriston's unusual request to my mind, the probabilities are that I should not have thought again of the matter. Now, by a remarkable coincidence, I was spending the night with the very man who, so far as my memory served me, must have sat for the portrait shown me at Brand's house.

"I wonder what I did with the photo," I said. I turned out my letter-case. There it was, right enough! Shading it with one hand, I carefully compared it with the sleeper.

Not a doubt about it! So far as a photograph taken from a picture can go, it was the man himself. The same ragged beard, the same coarse features, the same surly look. Young Carriston was evidently a wonderful hand at knocking off a likeness. Moreover, in case I had felt any doubt on the matter, a printed note at the bottom of the photograph said that one joint was missing from a right-hand finger. Sure enough, my friend lacked that small portion of his misbegotten frame.

This discovery threw me into an ecstasy of delight. I laughed so loudly that I almost awoke the ruffian. I guessed I was going to take a glorious revenge for all the discomforts I had suffered. No one, I felt sure, could be looking for such a fellow as this to do any good to him. I was quite happy in the thought, and for the remainder of the night gloated over the idea of putting a spoke in the wheel of one who had been within an ace of causing my death. I resolved, the moment I got back to civilization, to send the desired intelligence to Brand, and hope for the best.

### III.

THE end of that wretched night came at last. When the welcome morning broke I found that a great change had taken place out-of-doors. The fierce snow-storm had been the farewell of the

frost. The heavy rain that followed had filled the roads with slushy and rapidly thawing snow. I managed to extort some sort of a breakfast from my host, then, having recompensed him according to my promise, not his deserts, started, as soon as I could, on the bare back of my unfortunate steed, for Midcombe, which place, after my night's experiences, seemed gifted with merits not its own.

I was surprised, upon leaving the house, to find it was of larger dimensions than, from the little I saw of it during the night, I had imagined. It was altogether a better class of residence than I had supposed. My surly friend accompanied me until he had placed me on the main road, where I could make no possible mistake. He was kind enough to promise to assist any one I might send out in getting the dog-cart once more under way. Then, with a hearty wish on my part that I might never again meet with his like, we parted.

I found my way to Midcombe without much trouble. I took off my things, had a wash, and, like a sensible man for once, went to bed. But I did not forget to send a boy straight off to the nearest telegraph station. My message to Brand was a brief one. It simply said: "Tell your friend I have found his man." This duty done, I dismissed all speculation as to the result from my mind, and settled down to make up arrears of sleep.

I was surprised at the reply received that same evening from Brand: "We shall be with you as soon as we can get down to-morrow. Meet us at station." From this it was clear that my friend was wanted particularly—all the better! I turned to the time-table and found that; owing to changes and delays, they could not get to C——, the nearest station to Midcombe, until three o'clock in the afternoon. I inquired about the crippled dog-cart. It had been brought in; so I left strict instructions that a shaft of some sort was to be rigged in time for me to drive over the next day and meet the doctor and his friend.

They came as promised. It was a comfort to see friends of any description, so I gave them a hearty welcome. Carriston took hold of both my hands, and shook them so warmly that I began to fear I had discovered a long-lost father of his in my friend. I had almost forgotten the young fellow's appearance, or he looked a very different man to-day from the one I had seen when last we met. Then he was a wan, pensive, romantic, poetical-looking sort of fellow; now he seemed full of energy, vitality, and grit. Poor old Brand looked as serious as an undertaker engaged in burying his own mother.

Carriston began to question me, but Brand stopped him. "You promised I should make inquiries first," he said. Then he turned to me.

"Look here, Richard"—when he calls me Richard I know he is fearfully in earnest—"I believe you have brought us down on a fool's errand; but let us go to some place where we can talk together for a few minutes."

I led them across the road to the Railway Inn. We entered a room, and having for the sake of appearances ordered a little light refreshment, told the waiter to shut the door from the outside. Brand settled down with the air of a cross-examining counsel. I expected to see him pull out a New Testament and put me on my oath.

"Now, Richard," he said, "before we go further I want to know your reasons for thinking this man, about whom you telegraphed, is Carriston's man, as you call him."

"Reasons! Why, of course he is the man. Carriston gave me his photograph. The likeness is indisputable—leaving the finger-joint out of the question."

Here Carriston looked at my cross-examiner triumphantly. The meaning of that look I have never to this hour understood. But I laughed because I knew old Brand had for once made a mistake, and was going to be called to account for it. Carriston was about to speak, but the doctor waved him aside.

"Now, Richard, think very carefully. You speak of the missing finger-joint. We doctors know how many people persuade themselves into



all sorts of things. Tell me, did you notice the likeness before you saw the mutilated finger, or did the fact of the finger being mutilated bring the likeness to your mind?"

"Bless the man," I said; "one would think I had no eyes. I tell you there is no doubt about this man being the original of the photo."

"Never mind—answer my question."

"Well, then, I am ashamed to confess it, but I put the photo in my pocket, and forgot all about it until I had recognized the man, and pulled out the likeness to make sure. I didn't even know there was a printed description at the foot, nor that any member was wanting. Confound it, Brand! I'm not such a duffer as you think."

Brand did not retaliate. He turned to his friend and said gravely, "To me the matter is inexplicable. Take your own course as I promised you should." Then he sat down, looking deliciously crestfallen, and wearing the discontented expression always natural to him when worsted in argument.

It was now Carriston's turn. He plied me with many questions. In fact, I gave him the whole history of my adventure. "What kind of house is it?" he asked.

"Better than a cottage, scarcely a farm-house. A place, I should think, with a few miserable acres of bad land belonging to it. One of those

wretched little holdings which are simply curses to the country."

He made lots of other inquiries, the purport of which I could not then divine. He seemed greatly impressed when I told him that the man had never for a moment left me alone. He shot a second glance of triumph at Brand, who still kept silent, and looking as if all the wind had been taken out of his sails.

"How far is the place?" asked Carriston. "Could you drive me there after dark?"

At this question the doctor returned to life. "What do you mean to do?" he asked his friend. "Let us have no nonsense. Even now I feel sure that Fenton is misled by some chance resemblance—"

"Deuce a bit, old chap," I said.

"Well, whether or not, we needn't do foolish things. We must go and swear information, and get a search warrant, and the assistance of the police. The truth is, Richard," he continued, turning to me, "we have reason to believe, or I should say Carriston persists in fancying, that a friend of his has for some time been kept in durance by the man whom you say you recognized."

"Likely enough," I said. "He looked villain enough for any thing up to murder."

"Any way," said Brand, "we must do every thing according to law."

"Law! I want no law," answered Carriston.

"I have found her, as I knew I should find her. I shall simply fetch her, and at once. You can come with me or stay here, as you like, doctor; but I am afraid I must trouble your friend to drive me somewhere near the place he speaks of."

Foreseeing an adventure and great fun—moreover, not unmoved by thoughts of revenge—I placed myself entirely at Carriston's disposal. He expressed his gratitude, and suggested that we should start at once. In a few minutes we were ready, and mounted the dog-cart. Brand, after grumbling loudly at the whole proceeding, finished up by following us, and installing himself in the back seat. Carriston placed a parcel he carried inside the cart, and away we went.

It was now nearly dark, and raining cats and dogs. I had my lamps lighted, so we got along without much difficulty. The roads were deep with mud; but by this time the snow had been pretty nearly washed away from everywhere. I don't make a mistake in a road twice, so in due course we reached the scene of my upset. Here I drew up.

"The house lies about five hundred yards up the lane," I told Carriston; "we had better get out here."

"What about the horse?" asked Brand.

"No chance of any one passing this way on such a night as this; so let us put out the lamps and tie him up somewhere."

We did so; then struggled on afoot until we saw the gleam of light which had been so welcomed by me two nights before.

It was just about as dark as pitch; but, guided by the light, we went on until we stood in front of the house, where a turf bank and a dry hedge hid us from sight, although on such a night we had little fear of our presence being discovered.

"What do you mean to do now?" asked Brand, in a discontented whisper. "You can't break into the house."

Carriston said nothing for a minute; then I felt him place his hand on my shoulder.

"Are there any horses, any cows, about the place?" he asked.

I told him I thought that my surly friend rejoiced in the possession of a horse and a cow.

"Very well. Then we must wait. He'll come out to see them before he goes to bed," said Carriston, as decidedly as a general giving orders just before a battle.

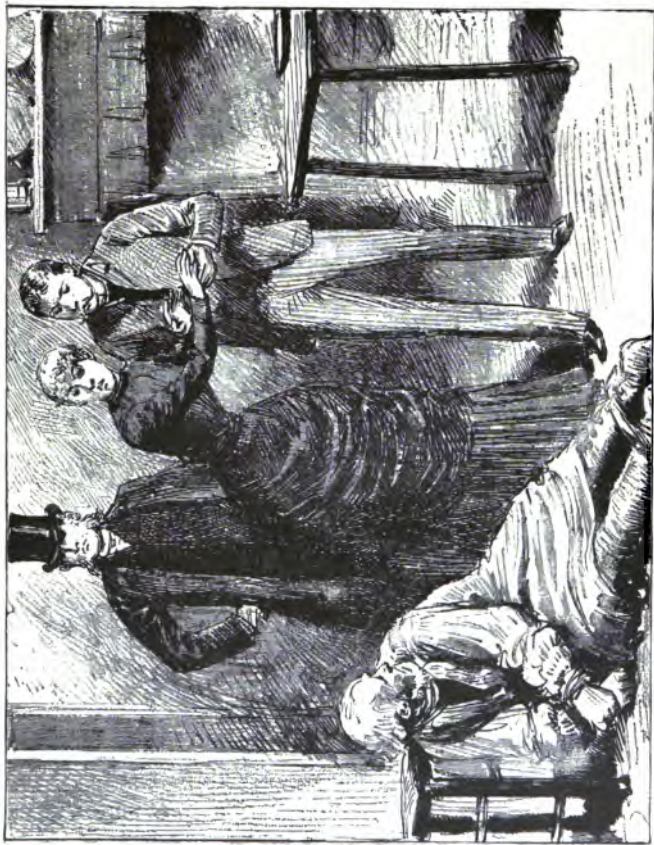
I could not see how Brand expressed his feelings upon hearing this order from our commander—I know I shrugged my shoulders, and if I said nothing, I thought a deal. The present situation was all very well for a strongly-interested party like Carriston, but he could scarcely expect others to relish the prospect of waiting, it might be for hours, under that comfortless hedge. We were all wet to the skin, and although I was

extremely anxious to see the end of the expedition, and find poetical justice meted out to my late host, Carriston's Fabian tactics lacked the excitement I longed for. Brand, in spite of his disapproval of the whole course of action, was better off than I was. As a doctor, he must have felt sure that, provided he could survive the exposure, he could secure two fresh patients. However, we made no protest, but waited for events to develop themselves.

#### IV.

MORE than half an hour went by. I was growing numbed and tired, and beginning to think that we were making asses of ourselves, when I heard the rattle of a chain, and felt Carriston give my arm a warning touch. No doubt my late host had made sure that his new door-fastenings were equal to a stronger test than that to which I had subjected the former ones; so we were wise in not attempting to carry his castle by force.

The door opened and closed again. I saw the feeble glimmer of a lantern moving toward the outhouse in which my horse had been stabled. I heard a slight rustling in the hedge, and, stretching out my arm, found that Carriston had left my side. In the absence of any command from him



"'BIND HIM!' PANTED CARRISTON."



I did not follow, but resumed the old occupation—waiting.

In a few minutes the light of the lantern re-appeared; the bearer stood on the threshold of the house, while I wondered what Carriston was doing. Just as the door was opened for the boor's readmittance, a dark figure sprang upon him! I heard a fierce oath and a cry of surprise; then the lantern flew out of the man's hand, and he and his assailant tumbled struggling through the narrow door-way!

"Hurrah! the door is won, any way!" I shouted, as followed closely by the doctor, I jumped over the hedge and rushed to the scene of the fray.

Although Carriston's well-conceived attack was so vigorous and unexpected that the man went down under it; although our leader utilized the advantage he had gained in a proper and laudable manner, by bumping that thick bullet head as violently as he could against the flags on which it lay; I doubt if, after all, he could have done his work alone. The countryman was a muscular brute and Carriston but a stripling. However, our arrival speedily settled the question.

"Bind him!" panted Carriston; "there is cord in my pocket." He appeared to have come quite prepared for contingencies. While Carriston still embraced his prostrate foe, and Brand, to facilitate matters, knelt on his shoulders, sat on his



head, or did something else useful, I drew out from the first pocket I tried a nice length of half-inch line, and had the immense satisfaction of trussing up my scowling friend in a most workmanlike manner. He must have felt those turns on his wrists for days afterward. Yet when we were at last at liberty to rise and leave him lying helpless on his kitchen floor, I consider I exercised great self-denial in not bestowing a few kicks upon him, as he swore at us in his broadest vernacular, in a way which, under the circumstances, was no doubt a great comfort to him.

We scarcely noticed the man's wife while we rendered the husband helpless. As we entered she attempted to fly out, but Brand, with a promptitude which I am glad to record, intercepted her, closed the door, turned and pocketed the key. After that the woman sat on the floor and rocked herself to and fro.

For some moments, while recovering his breath, Carriston stood and positively glared at his prostrate foe. At last he found words.

"Where is she? Where is the key, you hound?" he thundered out, stooping over the fellow, and shaking him with a violence which did my heart good. As he received no answer save the unrecordable expressions above-mentioned, we unbuttoned the wretch's pockets, and searched those greasy receptacles. Among the usual litter we did certainly find a key. Carriston

snatched at it, and shouting "Madeline! Madeline! I come!" rushed out of the room like a maniac, leaving Brand and me to keep guard over our prisoners.

I filled a pipe, lighted it, and then came back to my fallen foe.

"I say, old chap," I said, stirring him gently with the toe of my boot, "this will be a lesson to you. Remember, I told you that civility costs nothing. If you had given me Christian bed accommodation instead of making me wear out my poor bones on that infernal chair, you could have jogged along in your rascality quite comfortably, so far as I am concerned."

He was ungrateful—so much that my desire to kick him was intensified. I should not like to swear I did not to a slight degree yield to the temptation.

"Push a handkerchief in his mouth," cried Brand, suddenly. "A lady is coming."

With right good will I did as the doctor suggested.

Just then Carriston returned. I don't want to raise home tempests, yet I must say that he was accompanied by the most beautiful creature my eyes have ever lighted upon. True, she was pale as a lily—looked thin and delicate, and her face bore traces of anxiety and suffering, but for all that she was beautiful—too beautiful for this world, I thought, as I looked at her. She was

clinging in a half-frightened, half-confiding way to Carriston, and he—happy fellow!—regardless of our presence, was showering down kisses on her sweet pale face. Confound it! I grow quite romantic as I recall the sight of those lovers.

A most curious young man, that Carriston! He came to us, the lovely girl on his arm, without showing a trace of his recent excitement.

“Let us go now,” he said, as calmly as if he had been taking a quiet evening drive. Then he turned to me.

“Do you think, Mr. Fenton, you could without much trouble get the dog-cart up to the house?”

I said I would try to do so.

“But what about these people?” asked Brand.

Carriston gave them a contemptuous glance. “Leave them alone,” he said. “They are but the tools of another—him I can not touch. Let us go.”

“Yes, yes. But why not verify your suspicions while you can?”

Just like Brand! He's always wanting to verify every thing.

In searching for the key we had found some papers on our prisoner. Brand examined them, and handed to Carriston an envelope which contained what looked like bank-notes.

Carriston glanced at it. “The handwriting is, of course, disguised,” he said, carelessly, “but

the postmark shows whence it came. It is as I always told you. You agree with me now?"

"I am afraid I must," said Brand, humbly. "But we must do something about this man," he continued.

Hereupon Carriston turned to our prisoner. "Listen, you villain," he said. "I will let you go scot-free if you breathe no word of this to your employer for the next fortnight. If he learns from you what has happened before that time, I swear you shall go to penal servitude. Which do you choose?"

I pulled out the gag, and it is needless to say which the fellow chose.

Then I went off, and recovered the horse and cart. I relighted the lamps, and with some difficulty got the dog-cart up to the house. Carriston must have exactly anticipated the events of the night. The parcel he had brought with him contained a bonnet and a thick, warm cloth cloak; his beautiful friend was equipped with these. Then leaving the woman of the house to untie her husband at her leisure and pleasure, away we started; the doctor sitting by me; Carriston and the lady behind.

We just managed to catch the last train from C—. Not feeling sure as to what form inquiries might take to-morrow, I thought it better to go up to town with my friends, so, as we passed through Midcombe, I stopped, paid my bill, and

gave instructions for my luggage to be forwarded to me. By six o'clock the next morning we were all in London.

DR. BRAND IN CONCLUSION.

WHEN I asked Dick Fenton to relate his experiences I did not mean him to do so at such length. But there, as he has written it, and as writing is not a labor of love with him, let it go.

When Madeline Rowan found the bed, by the side of which she had thrown herself in an ecstasy of grief, untenanted, she knew in a moment that she was the victim of a deep-laid plot. Being ignorant of Carriston's true position in the world, she could conceive no reason for the elaborate scheme which had been devised to lure her so many miles from her home, and make a prisoner of her.

A prisoner she was. Not only was the door locked upon her, but a slip of paper lay on the bed. It bore these words: "No harm is meant you, and in due time you will be released. Ask no questions, make no foolish attempts at escape, and you will be well treated."

Upon reading this the girl's first thought was one of thankfulness. She saw at once that the reported accident to her lover was but an invention. The probabilities were that Carriston was alive, and in his usual health. Now that she felt certain of this, she could bear any thing.

From the day on which she entered that room, to that on which we rescued her, Madeline was, to all intents and purposes, as close a prisoner in that lonely house on the hill-side as she might have been in the deepest dungeon in the world. Threats, entreaties, promises of bribes availed nothing. She was not unkindly treated—that is, suffered no absolute ill usage. Books, materials for needle-work, and other little aids to while away time were supplied. But the only living creatures she saw were the woman of the house who attended to her wants, and, on one or two occasions, the man whom Carriston asserted he had seen in his trance. She had suffered from the close confinement, but had always felt certain that sooner or later her lover would find her, and effect her deliverance. Now that she knew he was alive she could not be unhappy.

I did not choose to ask her why she had felt so certain on the above points. I wished to add no more puzzles to the one which, to tell the truth, exercised, even annoyed me more than I care to say. But I did ask her if, during her incarceration, her jailer had ever laid his hand upon her.

She told me that some short time after her arrival a stranger had gained admittance to the house. While he was there the man had entered her room, held her arm, and threatened her with violence if she made any outcry. After hearing this I did not pursue the subject.

Carriston and Madeline were married at the earliest possible moment, and left England immediately after the ceremony. A week after their departure, by Carriston's request, I forwarded the envelope found upon our prisoner to Mr. Ralph Carriston. With it I sent a few lines stating where and under what peculiar circumstances we had become possessed of it. I never received any reply to my communication, so, wild and improbable as it seems, I am bound to believe that Charles Carriston's surmise was right—that Madeline was decoyed away and concealed, not from any ill will toward herself, but with a view to the possible baneful effect which her mysterious disappearance might work upon her lover's strange and excitable organization; and I firmly believe that had he not in some inexplicable way been firmly convinced that she was alive and faithful to him, the plot would have been a thorough success, and Charles Carriston would have spent the rest of his days in an asylum.

Both Sir Charles—he succeeded to his title shortly after his marriage—and Lady Carriston are now dead, or I should not have ventured to relate these things concerning them. They had twelve years of happiness. If measured by time, the period was but a short one; but I feel sure that in it they enjoyed more true happiness than many others find in the course of a protracted life. In word, thought, and deed they were as

one. She died in Rome of fever; and her husband, without, so far as I know, any particular complaint, simply followed her.

I was always honored with their sincerest friendship, and Sir Charles left me sole trustee and guardian to his three sons; so there are now plenty of lives between Ralph Carriston and his desire. I am pleased to say that the boys, who are as dear to me as my own children, as yet show no evidence of possessing any gifts beyond Nature.

I know that my having made this story public will cause two sets of objectors to fall equally foul of me—the matter-of-fact, prosaic man who will say that the abduction and subsequent imprisonment of Madeline Rowan was an absurd impossibility, and the scientific man, like myself, who can not, dare not believe that Charles Carriston, from either memory or imagination, could draw a face and describe peculiarities by which a certain man could be identified. I am far from saying there may not be a simple, natural explanation of the puzzle, but I, for one, have failed to find it, so close this tale as I began it, by saying I am a narrator, and nothing more.



# CHEWTON-ABBOT.

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## CHAPTER I.

**T**HE Abbots of Chewton-Abbot, Gloucestershire, were county people, and, moreover, had always occupied that coveted position. They dreaded not the researches of the officious antiquary who pokes about in pedigrees, and finds that, three or four generations ago, the founders of certain families acquired their wealth by trade. They at least were independent of money-earning. The fact that Chewton began to be known as Chewton-Abbot so far back as the fifteenth century, showed they were no upstarts. Indeed, if not of the very first rank—that rank from which knights of the shire are chosen—the Abbots, from the antiquity of their family, and from the centuries that family had owned the same estates, were entitled to dispute the question of precedence with all save a few very great magnates. They were undoubtedly people of importance. The reigning Abbot, it need scarcely be said, was always a county magistrate, and at some period of

his life certain to serve as sheriff. But for generations the family had occupied exactly the same position, and exercised exactly the same amount of influence in the land. The Abbots seemed neither to rise nor fall. If they added nothing to their estates, they alienated nothing. If they gave no great statesmen, warriors, or geniuses to the world, they produced, sparingly, highly respectable members of society, who lived upon the family acres and spent their revenues in a becoming manner.

The estates were unentailed ; but as, so far, no Abbot had incurred his father's displeasure, the line of descent from father to eldest son had been unbroken, and appeared likely to continue so. True, it was whispered, years ago, that the custom was nearly changed, when Mr. William Abbot, the present owner of the estate, was leading a life in London very different from the respectable traditions of the family. But the reports were not authenticated ; and as, soon after his father's death, he married a member of an equally old, equally respectable, and equally proud family, all such ill-natured gossip died a natural death ; and at the time this tale opens, William Abbot was leading the same quiet life his ancestors had led before him.

It was one of the cherished Abbot traditions that the family was not prolific. So long as the race was kept from disappearing, they were con-

tented. In this respect the present head of the family showed himself a true Abbot. He had but one son, a young man who had just taken a fair degree at Oxford, and who was now staying at Chewton Hall, before departing on a round of polite travel, which, according to old-world precedent, his parents considered necessary to crown the educational edifice.

Mr. and Mrs. Abbot were in the breakfast-room at Chewton Hall. Mr. Abbot was alone at the table, lazily discussing his breakfast. His wife and son, who were early risers, had taken that meal nearly an hour before. The young man being away on some outdoor pursuit, the husband and wife had the room to themselves. Mr. Abbot had just poured out his second cup of tea, and, according to his usual custom, commenced breaking the seals of the letters which lay beside his plate. His wife drew near to him.

"I am afraid that infatuated boy has in some way entangled himself with the young woman I told you of," she said.

"What young woman?" asked Mr. Abbot, laying down his letters.

"I told you last week he was always riding into Bristol—so often, that I felt sure there was some attraction there."

"You did, I remember. But I took little notice of it. Boys will be boys, you know."

"Yes; but it is time we interfered. I found

him this morning kissing a photograph and holding a lock of hair in his hand. I taxed him with his folly."

"My dear Helena," said Mr. Abbot, with a shade of contempt in his voice, "will you forgive my saying, that in matters of this kind it is best to leave young men alone, and not to see more than can be helped. Leave the boy alone—that is my advice."

"You don't quite understand me," replied Mrs. Abbot. "He wants to marry her."

"Wants to do what!" cried her husband, now fully aware of the gravity of the situation.

"He told me this morning he had asked her to be his wife. She would, he knew, consent, if we would welcome her as a daughter."

"How kind! How considerate!" said Mr. Abbot scornfully. "Who may she be, and where did Frank meet her?"

"He saved her from some incivility at the railway station, and so made her acquaintance. Who she is, he scarcely seems to know, except that her name is Millicent Keene, and that she lives with an aunt somewhere in Clifton. Frank gave me the address, and begged me to call—assuring me that I should take her to my heart the moment I saw her."

"He must be mad!" exclaimed Mr. Abbot rising and pacing the room. "Mad, utterly mad! Does he think that we are going to let him—an

Abbot—marry the first nameless young woman who strikes his fancy? I will talk to him, and soon bring him to his senses. The estates are unentailed, thank goodness! so I have some hold over him.”

Mrs. Abbot's lip just curled with scorn, as she heard her husband's direct commonplace plan for restoring her son's wandering senses. She knew that such parental thunderbolts were apt to do more harm than good.

“I would not threaten just yet,” she said. “Frank is very self-willed, and may give us trouble. For my part, I intend to drive into Clifton this morning and see the girl.”

“What folly? To give the affair your apparent sanction?”

“No. To show her how absurd it is to fancy we shall ever allow Frank to take a wife out of his proper sphere; and to hint that if he marries against our will, her husband will be a beggar. The fact of her withholding her consent to marry him, until we approve of her, shows me she is quite able to look after her own interests.”

Mr. Abbot, who knew his wife's skill in social diplomacy, offered no valid objections; so the horses were ordered, and Mrs. Abbot drove to Clifton.

The mistress of Chewton Hall was a woman of about fifty-five; tall and stately, noticeably but not attractively handsome. Rising in intellect

far above the level of the family into which she had married, she had started by endeavoring to mold her husband's mind to the capacities of her own. In the early days of their married life, she had urged him unceasingly to strive for a higher position in the world than that of a mere country gentleman. She wished him to enter the political arena; to contest a borough; in fact, to change his way of living entirely. But she found the task a hopeless one. A docile husband in most things, nothing could move William Abbot from the easy groove in which his forefathers had always placidly slid. The husband and wife were of very different natures. Perhaps the only common ground between them was their family pride and the sense of their importance. Yet while the gentleman was quite contented with the latter as it now stood, and always had stood, the lady was ambitious, and wished to augment it. But her efforts were of no avail; so at last, with a feeling touching dangerously near to contempt, she gave up attempting to sway her husband in this direction, and centered all her hopes in her only son, on whom she flattered herself she had bestowed some of her superior intellect. He should play an important part in the world. At the first opportunity he should enter parliament, become a distinguished member of society, and, so far as possible, satisfy her ambition. Of course he must marry, but his marriage should

be one to strengthen his hands both by wealth and connections. Now that he was on the threshold of man's estate, she had turned her serious attention to this subject, and had for some time been considering what heiresses she knew who were worthy of picking up the handkerchief which she meant to let fall on his behalf. She had postponed her decision until his return from the contemplated tour. Then she would broach the subject of an advantageous matrimonial alliance to him. By broaching the subject, Mrs. Abbot meant laying her commands upon her son to wed the lady she had chosen for him.

As she drove along the twelve miles of road to Clifton, and reflected on all these things, is it any wonder that her frame of mind was an unpleasant one; that her eyes grew hard, and she felt little disposed to be merciful to the owner of that pretty face which threatened to come between her and the cherished schemes of years?

The carriage stopped at the address given her by her son—a quiet little house in a quiet little street, where the arrival of so grand an equipage and so fine a pair of horses was an event of sufficient rarity to make many windows open, and maid-servants, even mistresses, crane out and wonder what it meant. Mrs. Abbot, having ascertained that Miss Keene was at home, and having made known her wish to see her, was shown into a room plainly but not untastefully furnished.

A piano, an unfinished drawing, some dainty embroidery, gave evidence of more refinement than Mrs. Abbot expected, or, to tell the truth, hoped to find in her enemy's surroundings. A bunch of flowers, artistically arranged, was in a glass vase on the table; and the visitor felt more angry and bitter than before, as she recognized many a choice orchid, and knew by this token that the Chewton hothouses had been robbed for Miss Keene's sake. Mrs. Abbot tapped her foot impatiently as she awaited the moment when her youthful enemy should appear and be satisfactorily crushed.

The mistress of Chewton-Abbot had somehow conceived the idea that the girl who had won her son's heart was of a dollish style of beauty. She may have jumped at this conclusion from the memories of her own young days, when she found the heart of man was more susceptible to attractions of this type than to those of her own severer charms. Pretty enough, after a fashion, she expected to find the girl, but quite crushable and pliant between her clever and experienced hands. She had no reason for this impression. She had coldly declined to look at the portrait which her son, that morning, had wished to show her. Having formed her own ideal of her would-be successor at Chewton-Abbot Hall, she regulated her actions accordingly. Her plan was to begin by striking terror into the foe. She wished no decep-



tion ; the amenities of social warfare might be dispensed with on this occasion. Knowing the advantage usually gained by a sudden and unexpected attack, she had not revealed her name. She simply desired the servant to announce a lady to see Miss Keene.

Hearing a light step approaching the door, Mrs. Abbot drew herself up to her full height and assumed the most majestic attitude she could. It was as one may imagine a fine three-decker of the old days, turning her broadside, with sixty guns run out and ready for action, upon some puny foe, to show her that at a word she might be blown out of the water. Or it was what is called nowadays a demonstration in force.

The door opened, and Millicent Keene entered. Mrs. Abbot bowed slightly ; then, without speaking a word, in a deliberate manner looked the new-comer up and down. She did not for a moment attempt to conceal the object of her visit. Her offensive scrutiny was an open declaration of war, and the girl was welcome to construe it as such.

But what did the great lady see as she cast that hostile, but, in spite of herself, half-curious glance on the girl who came forward to greet her unexpected visitor? She saw a beautiful girl of about nineteen ; tall, and making allowances for age, stately as herself. She saw a figure as near perfection as a young girl's may be. She saw a sweet,

calm face, with regular features and pale, pure complexion, yet with enough color to speak of perfect health. She saw a pair of dark-brown, truthful eyes—eyes made darker by the long lashes—a mass of brown hair dressed exactly as it should be. She saw, in fact, the exact opposite to the picture she had drawn, and as Millicent Keene, with graceful carriage, and a firm but light step, advanced toward her, Mrs. Abbot's heart sank. She had entirely miscalculated the strength of the enemy, and she felt that it would be no easy matter to tear a woman such as this from a young man's heart.

The girl bore Mrs. Abbot's offensive glance bravely. She returned her bow, and without embarrassment, begged her to be seated. Then she waited for her visitor to explain the object of her call.

"You do not know who I am, I suppose?" said Mrs. Abbot after a pause.

"I have the pleasure of knowing Mrs. Abbot by sight," replied Millicent in a perfectly calm voice.

"Then you know why I have called upon you?"

The girl made no reply.

Mrs. Abbot continued, with unmistakable scorn in her voice: "I have called to see the young lady whom my son tells me he is resolved, against his parents' wish, to make his wife."

"I am sorry, Mrs. Abbot, you should have thought it needful to call and tell me this."

"How could you expect otherwise? Frank Abbot bears one of the oldest names, and is heir to one of the best estates in the county. When he marries, he must marry a wife in his own position. What has Miss Keene to offer in exchange for what he can bestow?"

The girl's pale face flushed; but her brave brown eyes met those of her interrogator without flinching. "If I thought you would understand me, Mrs. Abbot, I should say that I have a woman's true love to give him, and that is enough. He sought me, and won that love. He asked for it, and I gave it. I can say no more."

"In these days," said Mrs. Abbot, contemptuously, "persons in our station require more than love—*that*, a young man like Frank can always have for the asking.—Of what family are you, Miss Keene?"

"Of none. My father was a tradesman. He was unfortunate in his business, and has been many years abroad trying to redeem his fortunes. With the exception of an education which, I fear, has cost my poor father many privations, I have nothing to boast of. I live with an aunt, who has a small income of her own. Now you know my history."

Mrs. Abbot had soon seen that crushing tactics failed to meet the exigencies of the case. She

put on an appearance of frankness. "You are candid with me, Miss Keene, and it appears to me you have plenty of common-sense. I put it to you: do you think that Mr. Abbot or myself can lend our sanction to this ill-advised affair?"

The girl's lip curled in a manner which was particularly galling to Mrs. Abbot. A tradesman's daughter, whose proper place was behind a counter, had no right to be able to assume such an expression! "That was for Frank, not for me, to consider, Mrs. Abbot."

"But surely you will not marry him against our wishes?"

The girl was silent for a minute. An answer to such a question required consideration. "Not yet," she said. "We are both too young. But if, in after-years, Frank Abbot wishes me to be his wife, I will share his lot, let it be high or low." She spoke proudly and decisively, as one who felt that her love was well worth having, and would make up for much that a man might be called on to resign in order to enjoy it.

It was this independence, the value the tradesman's daughter set upon herself, that annoyed Mrs. Abbot, and led her into the mistake of firing her last and, as she hoped, fatal shot. "You are not perhaps aware," she said, "that the estate is unentailed."

Millicent, who did not at once catch the drift of her words, looked inquiringly.

"I mean," explained Mrs. Abbot, "that my husband may leave it to whom he likes—that if you marry my son, you will marry a beggar."

The girl rose. With all her practice, Mrs. Abbot herself could not have spoken or looked more scornfully. "How little you know me, madam, to insult me like that! Have you so poor an opinion of your son as to fancy I can not love him for himself? Did you marry Mr. Abbot for his wealth?"—Mrs. Abbot winced mentally at the question.—"Do you think I wish to marry Francis Abbot only for the position I shall gain? You are wrong—utterly wrong!"

"Then," said Mrs. Abbot with the bitterness of defeat, "I suppose you will persist in this foolish engagement, and the only chance I have is an appeal to my son?"

"I have promised to be his wife. He alone shall release me from that promise. But it may be long before he can claim it, and so your anxiety may rest for some time, Mrs. Abbot. I have this morning received a letter from my father. He wishes me to join him in Australia. Next month I shall sail, and it will probably be three or four years before I return. Then, if Frank wishes me to be his wife—if he says to me: 'I will risk loss of lands and love of parents for your sake,' I will bid him take me, and carve out a way in the world for himself."

A weight was lifted from Mrs. Abbot's mind.

She caught the situation at once. Three or four years' separation! What might not happen! Although she strove to speak calmly as a great lady should, she could not keep a certain eagerness out of her voice. "But will you not correspond during that time?"

This was another important question. Again Millicent paused, and considered her answer. "I will neither write nor be written to. If, eventually, I marry your son—if his love can stand the test of absence and silence—at least you shall not say I did not give him every opportunity of terminating our engagement."

Mrs. Abbot rose and assumed a pleasant manner—so pleasant that, considering the respective positions of herself and Miss Keene, it should have been irresistible. "I am compelled to say that such a decision is all I could expect. You must forgive me if, with my views for my son's career, I have said any thing hasty or unjust. I will now wish you good-morning; and I am sure, had we met under other circumstances, we might have been great friends."

Whatever of dignity and majesty Mrs. Abbot dropped as she put on the appearance of friendliness was taken up by the girl. She took no notice of her visitor's outstretched hand. She rang the bell for the servant, and bowed coldly and haughtily as Mrs. Abbot swept from the room.

But bravely as she had borne herself under the eyes of her inquisitor, when the rumble of the carriage wheels died away from the quiet street, Millicent Keene threw herself on the sofa and burst into a flood of tears. "Oh, my love!" she sobbed out. "It is hard; but it is right. It will never be, I know! It is too long—too long to wait and hope. Can you be true when every thing is brought to bear against me? Will you forget? Will the love of to-day seem but a boy's idle dream? Shall *I* ever forget?"

## CHAPTER II.

MRS. ABBOT drove home in her stately carriage thinking deeply. Her mind was tolerably easy. She knew there was little chance of a young man's love living through years of absence and silence. Frank would go into the great world, and gaze on many a fair face during that time; till the beautiful face of Millicent Keene—for even Mrs. Abbot could not gainsay the girl's beauty—would gradually fade from his thoughts. He would taste the cup of ambition; he would see what power and station meant in the world, and would soon laugh to scorn his boyish dream. He would very quickly realize the difference between Abbot of Chewton Hall and plain Frank Abbot, who had to earn the bread to keep a wife, be she ever so charming.

In fact, the thoughts of Mrs. Abbot in her carriage and Miss Keene on her sofa were almost identical, although the words which expressed them differed.

Save for one thing, Mrs. Abbot's reflections were very comforting. The drawback was that she felt lowered in her own eyes. She had made a mistake, and had been treated with contumely. The victory was hers, but she had not won it herself. It was not her cleverness, but the girl's right-mindedness which would bring about the separation. She blamed herself for having misread the girl's character, and found her honest indignation at the imputation that her love for Frank was influenced by his possessions, mortifying to think of. Still, matters had turned out well. She would have the satisfaction of telling her husband that all was, or would be, at an end—that the hope of the Abbots would not marry nobody's daughter. So busy was she with these thoughts, that she did not notice, when some three miles outside the smoky town of Bristol, a horseman approaching. Upon seeing him, her coachman gathered up the reins preparatory to stopping his horses; but, as the rider made a negative gesture, he simply touched his hat and drove on; while Frank Abbot and his mother passed, neither apparently noticing the other.

He was a handsome young fellow, and without a cent to his name might have given many a wealthy competitor long odds in the race for a girl's heart.



Tall and broad-shouldered—clever face, with deep-set eyes, large chin, and firm lips, he sat his horse gracefully, looking every inch a gentleman and an Englishman. Not, one would say, the man to win a woman's love, and throw it aside at the bidding of father or mother. Not the man to do a thing hastily and repent the deed at his leisure. Rather, a man who, when once engaged in a pursuit, would follow it steadfastly to the end, whatever that end might be. It was scarcely right that Millicent Keene should allow fear to mingle with her grief at the approaching long separation from her lover. She should have looked into that handsome, powerful face and understood that years would only mold the boy's intention into the man's determination.

Naturally, he was at the present moment rather down-hearted. His mother, having learned his secret, had refused him sympathy or aid. Too well he knew she was to be swayed neither by entreaty nor argument. He was now riding over to Clifton to reiterate his love to Millicent, and to consult as to future steps. As he passed the carriage, he wondered what had brought his mother in that direction. She had not mentioned her intention of going to the town, nor had she asked for his escort as usual. Could it be possible that she had driven over to visit Millicent? If so, he knew it boded ill; so, pricking on as fast as he could, he reached Clifton just as the girl had grown more

calm and had washed away the traces of her recent tears.

Frank was terribly upset by her recital of the events of the morning. Although she did not repeat the whole conversation, he knew his mother well enough to be able to supply what Millicent passed lightly over. The proposed separation was a thunderstroke to him. In vain he entreated the girl to reconsider her determination. The promise was made, and her pride alone would insure her keeping it. Of course Frank vowed, after the usual manner of lovers, that love would grow stronger in absence; and as he thoroughly believed what he vowed, his vows were very consoling to the girl. He declared he also would go to Australia; marry Millicent, and take to sheep-farming, leaving the paternal acres to shift for themselves. All this and many other wild things the young fellow said; but the end was a sorrowful acquiescence in the separation, tempered by the firm resolve of claiming her in four years' time in spite of any home opposition. Having settled this, the heir of the Abbots rode home in a state of open rebellion against his parents.

This they were quite prepared for, and had, like sensible people, made up their minds to endure his onslaught passively. His mother made no reply to his reproaches; his father took no notice of his implied threats; but both longed for the time to come when Miss Keene would sail to

distant shores and the work of supplanting her might begin.

About one thing Frank was firm, and Millicent perhaps, did not try to dissuade him from it. Until they were bound to part, he would see her every day. Mr. and Mrs. Abbot knew why his horse was ordered every morning, and whence that horse bore him at eve; but they said nothing.

The fatal day came soon enough. Frank went down to Plymouth to see the very last of his love; and the mighty steamship *Chimborazo* bore away across the deep seas one of the sweetest and truest girls that ever won a man's heart. A week after she sailed, Frank Abbot started on his continental tour.

"I don't care much about it," he said to himself, dolefully enough; "but it may help to make some of the time pass quicker. Four years, my darling! How long it seems!"

"He will see the world," said Mrs. Abbot, "and learn that a pretty face is not every thing."

"He will fall in and out of love with a dozen girls before he returns," said Mr. Abbot cynically.

It has been before stated that for many years there had been little change in either the possessions or the position of the Abbots of Chewton-Abbot; but, like other people, they had occasional windfalls. Some years after Mr. Abbot succeeded to the estate, a new branch of a large railway

passed through an outlying part of his land, and he who made it a boast of never selling or mortgaging a single acre, was compelled, by the demands of public convenience and commerce, to part with what the railway wanted. Of course he obtained a good round sum as compensation. This lay for a long time at his banker's, waiting for any contiguous land which might come into the market. After a while, as no fields which he wished to add to his own were open to buyers, at his wife's suggestion he sought for another and more profitable investment, and in an evil hour became the proprietor of fifty shares in a bank, whose failure has now become historical.\* He bought these shares at a premium; while he held them, they went to a much higher premium, but no doubt the same tenacity which led him to cling to his acres made him keep to the same investment. The high rate of interest also was very useful, and kept another horse or two in the stables.

We can all remember the astonishment we felt that black day when the news of the stoppage of that particular bank was flashed from end to end of the kingdom, and how, afterward, the exposure of the reckless conduct of its directors, and of the rotten state in which the concern had been for years, sent a cold shudder down the back of every holder of bank stock.

Mr. Abbot was not a man of business. He did

not at once realize what being the registered owner of these fifty shares meant. He denounced the roguery of the directors, and vowed that if ever again he had money to spare, into land it should go, nowhere else. He had an idea that no more than the money which he had invested would be lost ; but when, after a few days, he gathered from the newspapers the true meaning of unlimited liability, his heart grew sick within him. The rental of his estate was about six thousand a year ; so, when call after call was made on the shareholders, William Abbot knew that he was a ruined man, and lamented his folly for not having entailed the estates. Lands, house, furniture, plate, all came to the hammer ; and so far as county people and landed gentry, the Abbots were extinct. Mrs. Abbot had a jointure of some five hundred a year, on which the unfortunate couple were fain to live as best they could. They took a house at Weymouth, and in that retired watering-place mourned their woes in genteel obscurity.

So Frank Abbot came back from Switzerland to begin the world on his own account, with nothing but a college degree, a perfect constitution, and a few hundred pounds scraped together by the sale of his personal effects. How should he earn his living ? He was sorely tempted to emigrate. He had the frame and muscles for hard work, and outdoor life would suit him. Yet he shrank from the idea of giving up as beaten in his

native land. Other men had made their way; why should not he? He felt a consciousness of a certain ability which necessity might force into full play. His mother suggested the church. "A clergyman of good family can always marry a rich wife, and that you are bound to do now." Frank shrugged his broad shoulders, and thought sadly of his promised wife, so many thousands of miles away. Eventually, he decided to read for the bar. He knew it would be slow work to win success there—that for many years he must be prepared to endure penury; but a career might be made. If a hundred fail, one succeeds—why should he not be that one?

Millicent must be told the bad news. He had no right to keep a girl's love during all the years which must elapse before he could offer her a home. He must at least release her from her vows. If—and as he believed it would be—she refused to be released, they must wait and hope. Now that the reality of marrying on nothing came home to him, he saw what it meant—what misery it must entail. Now that the earning his own living, of which he had spoken so bravely when there was no need of his doing so, was forced upon him, he became quite aware of the sacrifices he must make. He was no desponding coward, and indeed had little doubt as to his ultimate success. He felt that he could bear hardship himself; but he could not bear it if Millicent must also share

it. At any rate it was right she should know the change in his fortunes. So he wrote a few words: "MY DARLING—We are all ruined. I am going to try and make a living as a barrister. Of course I must now release you from every promise." He signed his name; but before sealing the letter, could not help adding: "But I love you more than ever." Then he sent the letter to Millicent's aunt, and begged that it might be forwarded to her niece.

That letter never reached its destination. Whether it was mislaid or misdirected—whether a mail-bag was lost either on the voyage or on the long land journey—whether Miss Keene's aunt, who had learned what reverses had befallen the Abbots, simply threw it on the fire, will never be known. All that can be said is, Millicent never received it; and after months had passed, Frank, who was looking eagerly for the overdue answer, grew very miserable, and began to doubt the love of woman.

Five long years have passed by. Frank Abbot is now a barrister of nearly three years' standing. He works hard, is frequently on circuit, and if, as yet, he has not achieved any brilliant forensic triumph, he is neither briefless nor without hope. Some small cases have been intrusted to him, and he finds the number of these slowly but surely increasing, and knows that if the opportunity comes, and if, when it does come, he may be able to seize

it and make the most of it, success may soon be his. Even now he makes enough to supply the modest wants to which he has tutored himself. But for some time after the last of his little capital had vanished, he had been hardly pressed. Indeed, in order to live at all, he had been compelled to accept some aid from his parents' reduced means. They gave this readily enough, as, with all their faults, they loved their son. Even to this day, Frank looks back with a shudder upon one or two years of his life.

The five years have changed him from a boy to a man. He is handsome as ever, but his look is more serious; his features express even more character. He has given up all dreams of the woolsack; but is conscious of possessing fair abilities, a good address, a commanding presence, and a great deal of ready self-confidence. He feels that in a few years' time he may have a home to share, if the woman he loves is still willing to share it. He has not again written to her. He has heard nothing from her, although the time by which he promised to claim her has long passed. He is, however, resolved that as soon as he sees the future fairly promising, he will seek her, and learn whether she is still true to him; or whether the sweetest episode of his life must be linked with the memory of a woman's faithlessness and inconstancy. He sighs as he thinks of the time which has elapsed since she waved him that last



farewell at Plymouth. "She may be married, years ago," he says, "and have three or four children by now." Then he thinks of her steadfast eyes, and knows that he wrongs her—blames himself for his mistrust. To sum up, Frank Abbot's constancy remains firm; but he is obliged to do what thousands of other men must do, hope for better days, working, meanwhile, with might and main to bring the dawn of those better days near.

Does he regret the loss of his fortune much? Of course he does, being neither a fool nor of a super-human nature. Many a day, as he sits in wig and gown in the stifling court, listening to learned arguments on cases in which he has not the remotest interest, his soul longs for a day with the pheasants, a run with the Duke's hounds, or a ride round the home-farm; and he anathematizes all joint-stock banks as roundly as his father may be supposed to have done. But, nevertheless, Frank is not a soured man. He is somewhat grave and self-contained, but pleasant company enough to the few men whom he chooses to call his friends.

He has not been near Chewton Hall since the family downfall. It had been bought, with a great part of the furniture, by a rich London merchant, whose name, although he had heard it at the time of the sale, had slipped from his mind. Frank cared little who held it. He knew it is only in romances that a ruined family regains possession of its kingdom. Some day he intended to run down

and have a look at the old place which he had loved so well ; although he feared the sight would not improve the tenor of his mind, or make him less inclined to rail at Fortune.

Just about this time Frank made a new acquaintance. It was long vacation. The Lord Chief-justice was yachting ; his brother-judges, Queen's Counsel, and learned leaders, were recruiting their jaded energies as it best pleased them ; gay juniors had thrown their wigs into their boxes, and were away on various holiday pursuits. Frank, however, who had recently succeeded in getting some occasional work on a journal, and who hoped to get more, was still in London. One morning, a gentleman, who wished to see Mr. Abbot, was shown into his chambers. The visitor was a tall, middle-aged man, strongly built, well dressed, and with pleasant features. He looked like one who had led a hard life, and lines on his brow told of trouble. His hands were large and brown—it was evident they had not been idle in their day. Not, perhaps, quite a gentleman, as we conventionally use, or abuse, that word, but a noticeable, out-of-the-common man. He gave Frank a sharp, quick glance, as if trying to gauge his intellect and powers. Apparently satisfied, he took the chair offered him, and explained his errand. He had a lawsuit pending, and wished Mr. Abbot to conduct the case. Frank interposed smilingly, and told his new client that it was etiquette for his in-

structions to come through a solicitor. He explained that a barrister and the man whose cause he pleaded must communicate through a third party. His visitor apologized for his ignorance about such matters, and said he would see his solicitor. However, after the apology was accepted, instead of bowing himself out, Mr. John Jones—for by that name he called himself—entered into a general kind of conversation with Frank. He spoke easily and pleasantly on a variety of topics, and when at last he left the room, shook hands most cordially with the young man, and hoped he should meet him again soon.

“Wonder who he is?” said Frank, laughing over the sudden friendliness this stranger had exhibited. “Any way, I hope he will make his solicitors send me that brief.”

However, no brief came; but for the next few days Frank Abbot was always tumbling across Mr. John Jones. He met him in the street as he went to and from his chambers. Mr. Jones always stopped him, shook hands, and as often as not, turned and walked beside him. Frank began to like the man. He was very amusing, and seemed to know every country under the sun. Indeed, he declared he was a greater stranger to London than to any other capital. He was a great smoker; and as soon as he found that Frank did not object to the smell of good tobacco in his chambers, scarcely a day went by without his paying him a

visit and having a long chat over a cigar. Frank was bound to think that Mr. John Jones had taken a great liking to him. Perhaps the man wanted a friend. As he said, he knew no one in London, and no one knew him.

So young Abbot drifted into intimacy with this lonely man, and soon quite looked forward to the sound of his cheerful voice and the fragrance of those particularly good cigars he smoked. He even, at Mr. Jones's urgent request, ran down to the seaside for a couple of days with him, and found the time pass very pleasantly in his society.

Although the young man was very reticent on the subject of his family's misfortune, Mr. Jones had somehow arrived at the conclusion that he was not rolling in wealth. He made no secret of the fact that he himself was absurdly rich. "I say, Abbot," he remarked one day, "if you want any money to push yourself up with, let me know." Perhaps Mr. Jones fancied that judgships were to be bought.

"I don't want any," said Frank shortly.

"Don't take offense. I said, if you do. Your pride—the worst part of you. It's very hard a man can only help a fellow like you by dying and leaving him money. I don't want to die just yet."

Frank laughed. "I want no money left me. I shouldn't take yours if you left it to me."

"Well, you'll have to some day, you see." Then Mr. John Jones lighted another cigar from the stump of the old one, and went his way; leaving Frank more puzzled than ever with his new friend.

But the next day an event occurred which drove Mr. John Jones, money, and every thing save one thing, out of his head: Millicent Keene was in England—in London!

When he saw her letter lying on his table, Frank Abbot feared it could not be real. It would fade away like a fairy bank-note. No; before him lay a few lines in her handwriting: "MY DEAR FRANK—I have returned at last. I am at No. 4 Caxton Place.—Yours, MILLICENT KEENE."

Early as it was, he rushed out of his office, jumped into a cab, and sped away to the address she gave him.

We may pass over the raptures, the embraces, the renewed vows, the general delicious character of that long-deferred meeting. We may suppose the explanation of the lost letter accounting for the girl's silence; and we may picture her sympathy with her lover's misfortunes, and her approval of the manly way in which he had gone to work to retrieve them, in some degree. Let us imagine them very, very happy, sitting hand in hand in a room at No. 4 Caxton Place; Millicent, by the by, looking more beautiful than ever, her charms not lessened by the look of joy in her dark eyes.

Their first transports are over. They have descended to mundane things. In fact, Frank is now telling her that he believes he can count on so many hundreds a year. What does his darling think?

Miss Keene purses up her pretty mouth and knits her brows. To judge by appearances, she might be the most mercenary young woman. Frank waits her reply anxiously.

"I think we may manage," she says. "I have been accustomed to poverty all my life, you know."

Frank would have vowed to work his fingers to the bones before she should want any thing; but remembering just in time that his profession worked with the tongue instead of the hands, checked himself. He thanked her with a kiss.

"When shall we be married?" he said.

She looked up at him shyly. "Would you think it very dreadful if I said the sooner the better? In fact, Frank, I have come from Australia to marry you. If you had forgotten me, I should have gone straight back."

"Next week?" asked Frank, scarcely believing his own happiness. "Will next week be too soon? One advantage of being poor and living in lodgings is, that we can be married without any bother 'about a house.'"

Millicent gave him to understand that next week would do. She was staying with some dis-

tant relative. No one's consent had to be asked. She had told her father all. The day Frank chose, she would be his wife.

"How is your father? I forgot to ask," said Frank.

"Much the same as ever," answered Millicent in a way which inferred that Mr. Keene's struggles to redeem fortune were as great as before.

Then she dismissed Frank until to-morrow. He went home walking on air, and, like a dutiful son, wrote to Mrs. Abbot, telling her that Millicent had returned, and next week would marry him. Mrs. Abbot's reply may be given here ;

"MY DEAR FRANK—I *say* nothing. I am too much *horrified*. If any young man was ever called upon to marry money and build up the fallen fortunes of a family, it is you. My last hope is gone. The obstinacy of your character I know too well. If I thought I could turn you from your purpose, I would come and *kneel at your feet*. If I knew Miss Keene's address, I would make one last appeal to her. She, I believe, was a sensible young woman.—Your affectionate MOTHER."

Frank laughed at the idea of Mrs. Abbot kneeling at his feet ; and had not the least intention of sending Millicent's address.

He saw little of any one for the next few days except Millicent. His poor friend Mr. John Jones called several times, but each time found him absent.

"Your master is neglecting his business," he said sternly to Frank's small clerk.

"Got something pleasanter to attend to," said the youth with a wink. He was a sharp lad, and able to form his own opinions.

One day toward the end of the week, Mr. Jones did succeed in catching his young friend, and, moreover, in smoking the whole of a long cigar in his society. "Look here, Abbot," he said, "what's up with you? Are you going to be married?"

"Yes," said Frank; "I am."

"Thought so," said Mr. Jones. "When?"

"Next Tuesday," answered Frank as laconically as his strange friend.

"Girl got money?"

"No; poorer than I am."

"That's bad. Tell me all about it."

Every man in Frank's plight likes a friend to unburden his heart to; so Mr. Jones had the whole history of his love affair, from the moment his mother intervened down to the present happy time. Frank waxed so eloquent, that his friend's eyes glistened, and when the history was finished, he grasped the young man's hand, and wished him good wishes, which were certainly heartfelt.

"I have a favor to ask," he said, in a very humble way, quite different from his usual energetic style of talking. "I haven't known you long, so it's presumption on my part. But I've



grown very fond of you. May I come to the church and see you married?"

• "You may be best-man, if you like; or you can give the bride away. It will save us having recourse to the sexton.—Only on one condition, though," continued Frank, struck by a sudden thought; "that is, you don't go making absurd presents."

"I must give you something."

"Give me a box of cigars, then."

"Very well," said Mr. Jones. "But you're disgustingly proud."

So it was settled. To Frank's great relief—for he disliked paining the man by refusing any thing—Mr. Jones brought him a box of his big cigars, and on the Tuesday morning accompanied him to the quiet town church, where in due time Millicent appeared, accompanied by her distant relative. Mr. John Jones acted in his twofold capacity with great decorum. Frank had laughingly told Millicent of the strange arrangement he had made. She raised no objection. "What does it matter," she said, "so long as we are really married?" So, when the clergyman asked who gave this woman, etc., Mr. Jones stepped forward and performed the office. When the ceremony was over, and the happy pair stepped into the carriage, thinking, no doubt, his services entitled him to some reward, he kissed the bride on her forehead—a proceeding which rather staggered Frank,

although, as Millicent did not seem annoyed, he said nothing.

"That old Jones is a strange fellow," he said, as Millicent and he were safely ensconced in the brougham.

"Yes. How long have you known him?"

"Only a week or two—quite a chance acquaintance."

"Chance acquaintances are not to be depended upon," said Mrs. Frank Abbot sententiously.

Then, as was but natural, they talked of other things, and dismissed Mr. John Jones from their happy minds.

During the last week, they had held many debates as to where they should spend the honeymoon. As yet, they had only partially settled the important point. By Millicent's express wish, the first week was to be passed at Clifton. "Dear old Clifton!" she said. "We met there first; remember that, sir!" Frank did not particularly want to go to Clifton, but he yielded without a murmur. Whether it should be Switzerland, Italy, France, Scotland, or Ireland afterward, was to be decided at their leisure. So the brougham drove to Paddington, and Mr. and Mrs. Frank Abbot took the train for the west.

They spent five happy days at Clifton; although they knew the scenery by heart, it looked more beautiful than ever under the present auspices. Then Frank began to talk about going elsewhere;

but Millicent seemed in no hurry to make a move. "I wonder, Frank," she said one evening, "you don't go over and have a look at your old home."

"I haven't the heart to go," sighed Frank. "I might have gone by myself; but I can't stand it with you. I shall be thinking all the while how you would have graced it."

"Who lives there now?"

"A Mr. Tompkinson—a London merchant."

"I should so like to see the place, Frank! Do take me to-morrow."

Frank, who, in truth, was longing to have a look at the old place, consented. They decided to go the next day. "We will have a carriage, and drive," said Frank.

"What extravagance!" said Millicent.

"Never mind. I shall only be married once. When our honeymoon is over, we will go in for strict economy."

Millicent agreed to this. So a carriage was hired the next morning, and they started for Frank's ancestral home.

It was a lovely September morning; the air was fresh and exhilarating. As soon as the dark, dusty city was left behind, Millicent's spirits rose to a mad pitch, which Frank, with all his newly married adoration, fancied was not quite in keeping with what was to him at least a sort of solemn pilgrimage. She caught hold of his hands and squeezed them, she laughed and talked; in fact,

generally misconducted herself. Frank had never seen her in such a mood before. He was fain to believe that she was forcing her merriment, to show him how little she cared for the loss of the wealth she would have shared. Nevertheless, as each landmark came in sight, and at last he knew that he was passing through lands which one day should have been his, he grew gloomy, moody, and miserable. Millicent saw what passed through his mind; she sank into silence; an occasional pressure of the hand only reminding him that at least he had her.

Presently he stopped the carriage. "You can get the best view of the dear old house from here," he said.

"Let us get out," said his wife.

They alighted, and for some minutes stood looking at the long gray house. Frank's eyes were full of tears.

"Can't we go over the house?" asked Millicent.

"By permission of Mr. Tompkinson, no doubt; but he is a stranger to me, so I don't care to ask it."

"But I want to see the inside so much, Frank; you have described it to me so often. Let us go up and ask if we can go over it."

The idea of asking leave to go over Chewton Hall was more than Frank could bear. "I would much rather not," he said.

"But I want to go, Frank," said Millicent,

pouting. "No one will know us, so what does it matter?"

Frank still shook his head and raised objections. If there was one thing above another he hated, it was asking favors of strangers. Chewton Hall was not a show-place. It boasted no specimens of interesting architecture; it possessed no gallery of paintings. As likely as not, when they reached the door and preferred their request, some flunky of this fellow Tompkinson's would order them off the grounds. In short, sorry as he was to disappoint his wife, Mr. Abbot firmly refused to ask leave to go over the Hall. Thereupon he discovered that he had married a young woman who had no intention of giving him abject obedience.

"It's very unkind of you," she said. "I *will* go over the place. If you won't come, I shall go alone." She turned away, pushed the lodge gate open in a most unceremonious way, and was twenty yards up the drive before her husband had recovered from his surprise. At first, he resolved to leave her to her fate; but that seemed an unkind thing to do. After all, she wanted to look over his old home solely for love of him. He could not let her go alone; besides, as he was hesitating, she turned and beckoned to him. So he walked after her.

As soon as Millicent had satisfied herself that her husband was following her, she quickened her pace to such an extent, that without actually run-

ning, he could not overtake her. Arguing that a man's running after a woman up a stranger's carriage-drive was not a dignified preparation to asking a favor, Frank followed his wife at a reasonable pace; and when he came up to her, found her standing at the door of the Hall in conversation with an elderly woman, who was evidently a housekeeper. Frank thought this good woman eyed him very curiously and suspiciously.

"It's all right, Frank," said Millicent, turning her smiling face to him. "We may go over the Hall. Mr. Tompkinson is not here at present."

"Please walk in," said the housekeeper, dropping a courtesy.

Millicent did so; and Frank followed her, sulkily. He did not approve of the proceedings. As his wife had forced him to the house, he had determined to send his card up to Mr. Tompkinson, trusting that his former connection with the place would excuse the liberty he was taking. But he did not like this going behind the man's back, and felt sure that Millicent had been smoothing the way with a bribe.

"That's the drawing-room—the dining-room—library—billiard-room," said the housekeeper, jerking her finger at the doors in succession. "Please walk through them; and ring when you'd like to go up stairs and see the view."

Therewith the woman vanished, after giving

Millicent a knowing look, which Frank felt sure spoke of wholesale bribery.

"I say, Millicent," said Frank, "we can't go walking about a man's house alone in this fashion."

"My dear," said Millicent very seriously, "I pledged my honor we would pocket nothing." Then she broke into an hysterical little laugh; and Frank wondered what had come to his wife.

"Let us go to the drawing-room first," she said, recovering her gravity, and opening the door pointed out by the housekeeper.

Frank passed through the doorway, and for a moment could think of nothing but how he should keep himself from quite breaking down. The room looked almost the same as when he last entered it—the same as he had known it from his earliest days. Every chair and table the same, or apparently so. Then he remembered that the purchaser of the house had also bought nearly all the household furniture. At the time, he was glad to think the old place would not be dismantled; now he regretted it had not been. The presence of the well-remembered Lares and Penates left the old home unchanged in all—save that it was no longer his home. There was the very stool on which as a boy he used to sit at his mother's feet; there was the wonderful Japanese cabinet, with dozens of little lackered drawers, which used to be opened now and again as a great treat to him. And here was he standing in the middle of these

old household gods, by permission of another man's servant. He wished he had been firm, and not yielded to Millicent's whim.

His heart was too full for words. He turned away from his wife, who was watching him earnestly, turned away, not willing she should see how much he was affected. He opened the door of the conservatory and passed out among the flowers. Even the flowers looked the same. The red stars of taxonia shone from the green clouds above as of old. The large heliotrope against the wall was in full blossom. The great center tree-palm was still there. The fountain played as of old, and splashed down on the goldfish swimming in the basin. How well he remembered when his great delight was to be lifted up to look at those red and white carp! He could stand these memories no longer. Let him go away—out of the house—never to come near it again. He went back to the room to find Millicent. The room was untenanted. He supposed his wife, taking advantage of the accorded permission, had extended her researches. He looked in the dining-room. As the old family portraits had been bought by his own people, this room did not appeal to him so much. He glanced round; Millicent was not there. He walked across the hall and opened the library door. He did not notice whether this room was changed or not. He had eyes for one thing only, and, perhaps, a more astonishing sight



was never seen by a six days' bridegroom. Here was Millicent—his wife, her hat and mantle thrown off, absolutely sitting on the knee of a gentleman; moreover, with her arms twined round his neck, her cheek resting against his, and so concealing his features from her outraged husband, who no doubt would have rushed to immolate his supposed rival, had not Millicent, without changing her position, looked at him with eyes so full of love, tenderness, and triumph that Frank Abbot stood rooted to the ground, and wondered why he should be dreaming in broad daylight. Then he grew very pale, all sorts of wild things rushing into his head. He managed to take a step or two forward; and Millicent, jumping off her human perch, rushed to meet him, threw her arms round his neck; sobbed and laughed, and all the while ejaculated: "My darling—my darling! My own love! To think it should be through me! My own dear husband!"

She kissed him and embraced him in so fervent a manner, that his attention could scarcely be given elsewhere; but the impression grew upon him that over her shoulder, sitting in the chair from which she had sprung, was his chance acquaintance, Mr. John Jones.

"What—does—it all mean?" gasped Mr. Abbot as his wife subsided on his shoulder.—"Mr. Jones, you here! What does it mean?"

Mr. Jones rose from his chair and held out his

hand. "Shake hands, Frank," he said. "It means this. I told you you'd have to take something from me, proud as you were. You've taken my daughter, at any rate."

"But"——

"Yes; I know. I'm Keene, not Jones. That girl of mine is a romantic, obstinate child. I'm an old fool, and ought to be ashamed of myself; but it did me good to find she was going to marry a man who thought she hadn't a pennypiece to her name. Shake hands, Frank."

"But—here!" ejaculated Frank.

"Yes, here. In my house; or rather, in yours and Millicent's. The truth is, when we landed in England, the first paper Milly saw held an advertisement, saying this place was for sale. She made me go the next day and buy it, stock, lock, and barrel. Now you know all."

"Oh Frank!" interposed Millicent, "forgive me—I had been in England four months before I wrote to you! Do forgive me, Frank! They were very long months."

As Frank gave her a passionate kiss, she supposed herself forgiven. Mr. Keene drew out his cigar-case.

"Now all's settled," he said, "I'll send and tell your carriage to go back. You can drive into Clifton this evening and fetch your luggage."

"Stop a moment!" said Frank. "Mr. Keene, I am too bewildered to say all I want to; but it

must be clearly understood that I am not going to be a dependent on your bounty."

"I always told you you were absurdly proud," growled Mr. Keene.

"I will not. Had I known that you had purchased my father's estate, I could not have married Millicent. I would not have let the world call me a fortune-hunter."

Mrs. Frank Abbot glanced at her father. "I told you what he was, papa," she said. Then turning to Frank: "Will you kindly look at me, sir, and tell me how I have changed so greatly that people will think I am only worth marrying for my money?"

To this challenge Frank made no reply in words. Then he took his wife's hand. "Millicent," he said, "shall it be clearly understood that you are the wife of a poor man—that you will be happy when I ask you to leave this and come to London with me, while I work at my profession as before?"

"Stuff and nonsense!" growled Mr. Keene. But Millicent looked into her husband's face and whispered: "My darling love, your wishes shall be mine!"

Then Mr. Keene went out and sent the carriage away.

It is a great temptation to describe the meeting between Mrs. Abbot and her daughter-in-law. The elder lady's surprise and joy simply beggar descrip-

tion. Loving her son as she really did, the reversionary restoration was as much a satisfaction to her as if her own husband had been reinstated. The meeting between the two ladies was embarrassing for both to look forward to; but it went off to perfection. Mrs. Abbot, all smiles and sweetness, embraced her daughter-in-law, and said: "My dear, I told you that under other circumstances we should be great friends. We shall be so now—shall we not?" It was a graceful, if not an unworldly apology; and as Millicent returned her kiss and begged her to forget what had happened, Mrs. Abbot hung round the girl's neck a diamond cross, which, being her own personal property, had survived the wreck; and after this, a peace was established which as yet has not been broken.

Did Frank Abbot continue to work as hard at his profession as he had resolved to do? The events above recorded are of comparatively recent date. So I can say with truth that he is still a working member of the bar, and is supposed to be making a fair income. As Mr. Keene had not the least intention of allowing his daughter to go empty-handed to a husband, however quixotic he might be, the young couple have always been far away from the poverty which one of them was continually harping upon. The last I heard about them is that Mr. Keene, who, since his daughter's

marriage, has spent most of his time in London, told Frank roundly, that unless he would bring Millicent back to Chewton, throw his pride to the winds, and live at the Hall as his forefathers had lived—acting, if he liked, for conscience' sake, as bailiff or manager of the estate—he, Mr. Keene, would at once sell the place, and invest the proceeds in something more profitable than a large house in which he could not live alone, or acres about which he cared nothing.

Millicent, who thinks Frank looking pale and fagged, and is quite sure that London air does not suit the baby, seconds her father's appeals with eloquent looks; and Frank, who has formed an affectionate regard for Mr. Keene, and who finds that, with such attractions at home, circuit-going is dreary work, certainly wavers in his determination; so it is more than likely that one day the bar will lose what might have been a distinguished ornament to it, and that Chewton Hall will once more have a proper master and mistress.

## PAUL VARGAS : A MYSTERY.

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**D**URING the course of my professional career I have met with many strange things. The strangest, the most incomprehensible of all, I am about to narrate.

Its effect upon me was such, that, without pausing for investigation or inquiry, I turned and fled from the town—even from the country in which I witnessed it. It was only when I was some thousands of miles away that I recovered from my terror sufficiently to think calmly over what had happened. Then I vowed a self-imposed vow that for many years I would mention the matter to no one. My reasons for secrecy were these :—

In the first place I was, as I am now, a doctor. Now I am fairly well-to-do, and have little anxiety about the future. Then I was struggling hard to make a living. Such being the case, I argued that the telling of an incredible, monstrous tale—the truth of which, however, I should be bound to uphold in spite of every thing and every body—would

do little toward enhancing my reputation for common sense, or improving my professional prospects.

In the second place I determined to wait, in the hope that, some time or another, matters might be explained to my satisfaction.

So it is that for twenty years I have kept my own counsel. My first reason for silence no longer exists; while, as to the second, I have now given up hoping for an elucidation. The one person who might make things clear I have never seen since.

Although nearly a third of a man's allotted years has passed, there need be no fear of my magnifying or mystifying any thing. The circumstances are still fresh in my mind; moreover, in the fear that memory should play me false, I wrote down at the time, all that happened—wrote it with a minuteness and technical detail which would be out of place here.

My story concerns a man whom I saw but thrice in my lifetime; or I should rather say, saw during three brief periods of my lifetime. We were medical students together. His name—I do not change it—was Paul Vargas.

He was a tall, dark-haired, pale-faced young man, strikingly handsome in his own peculiar style. His nose was aquiline and well-formed: the broad forehead betokened great intellectual power, and the mouth, chin, and strong square jaw all spoke of strength of will and resolution.

But had all these features been irregular and unpleasing, the eyes alone would have redeemed the face from plainness. More luminous, eloquent, expressive eyes I have never seen. Their dark beauty was enhanced by a distension of the pupil, seldom met with when the sight is perfect as was Vargas's. They possessed in a remarkable degree the power of reflecting the owner's emotions. Bright as they always were, they sparkled with his mirth, they glittered with his scorn, and when he seemed trying to read the soul of the man he looked at, their concentrated gaze was such as few could bear with perfect ease.

This is a description of Paul Vargas as I remember him when first we met. I may add that in age he was two years my senior; in intellect a hundred.

Of Vargas's family and antecedents his fellow-students knew nothing. That he was of foreign extraction was clearly shown by his name and general appearance. It was supposed that Jewish blood ran in his veins, but this was pure conjecture; for the young man was as reticent concerning his religious opinions as he was about every thing else connected with his private history.

I can not say he was my friend. Indeed, I believe he had no friends, and I think may add, no enemies. He was too polite and obliging to make foes; although there was usually a calm air of superiority about all he said and did, which at



times rather nettled such an unlicked lot of cubs as most of us were in those days.

Yet, if we were not bosom friends, for some months I saw a great deal of Paul Vargas. He was an indefatigable student, and, as if the prescribed course of study was not enough for him, was engaged during his leisure hours on some original and delicate experiments, conducted simply for his own pleasure. Wanting some one to assist him he was good enough to choose me. Why, I never knew. I flattered myself it was because he thought me cleverer than my fellows; but it may have been that he thought me duller and less likely to anticipate or forestall his discoveries.

Under this arrangement I found myself two or three nights in every week at his rooms. From his lavish expenditure in furniture and scientific apparatus, it was clear that Vargas had means of his own. His surroundings were very different from those with which the ordinary medical student must be contented.

All our fraternity looked upon Paul Vargas as abnormally clever; and when the closer intercourse began between us, I found at first no reason to differ from the general opinion. He seemed to have all the works of medical and surgical authorities at his finger ends. He acquired fresh knowledge without effort. He was an accomplished linguist. Let the book or pamphlet be English, French, or German, he read it with equal ease, and,

moreover, had the valuable knack of extracting the gist of the matter, while throwing aside any worthless lumber which surrounded it. From my average intellectual station I could but admire and envy his rapid and brilliant flights.

He made my visits to him pleasant ones. Our work over for the evening, it was his custom to keep me for an hour or two smoking and chatting; but our talk was not the confidence between two friends. Indeed, it was little more than scientific gossip, and the occasional airing of certain theories; for Vargas, if silent about himself and his private affairs, at least expressed his opinions on the world in general openly and freely.

He had resolved to become a specialist. He poured out the vials of his scorn on the ordinary general practitioner—the marvelous being who, with equal confidence, is ready to grapple with fever, gout, consumption, blindness, deafness, broken bones, and all the other ills and accidents which afflict mankind.

“It is absurd!” he said. “As well expect the man who made the lenses for that microscope to make the brass work also—as well ask the author of this treatise to print and bind it! I tell you one organ, one bit of the microcosm called man, demands a life’s study before the cleverest dare to say he understand it.”

Certainly the organ selected by Vargas for his special study was the most complex and unsatis-

factory of all—the brain. Any work, new or obsolete, which treated upon it—any thing which seemed to demonstrate the connection between mind and body, he examined with intense eagerness. The writings and speculations of the veriest old charlatans were not beneath his notice. The series of experiments we were conducting were to the same end. I need not describe them, but something of their nature may be guessed at, when I say it was long before the time when certain persons endeavored to persuade the world that scientists were fiends in human shape, who inflicted unheard-of tortures on the lower orders of animals, solely to gratify a lust for cruelty.

We had been engaged on our researches for some weeks—Vargas's researches I should call them, as by this time my conjectures as to what he aimed at had come to an end. I grew tired of groping in the dark, and was making up my mind to tell him he must enlighten me or seek other assistance. Besides, I began to think that after all, my first estimate of his ability was not quite correct.

He certainly talked at times in the strangest and most erratic way. Some of his speculations and theories were enough, if true, to upset all the recognized canons of science. So wild, indeed, that at times I wondered if, like many others, his genius was allied to madness.

At this time a wave of superstition crossed the

country—one of those periodical waves, which, whether called mesmerism, clairvoyance, electro-biology, spiritualism, or thought-reading, rise, culminate, and fall in precisely the same manner.

Paul Vargas, although ridiculing the new craze, read every thing that touched upon it, even down to the penny-a-liner's accounts of mysterious occurrences.

"The truth may be found any where," he said; "if there is a diamond in the ground the most ignorant boor may, unwittingly, dig it out."

One night I found him in a strange, pre-occupied mood. He did his work mechanically, and I could see that his thoughts kept straying away. We finished earlier than usual, and for a while he sat opposite to me in silence. Then he raised his eyes and asked me a question.

What the question was I have never been able to remember. I have racked my brain again and again, but have never recalled the purport of it. All I know is, it was, from a scientific point of view, so supremely ridiculous that I burst into a peal of laughter.

For a moment Paul Vargas's eyes positively flamed. Feeling that our relations were not friendly enough to excuse the indiscretion on my part, I hastened to apologize. He was himself again directly, and, with his calm, superior smile on his lips, assured me I had done nothing which demanded an apology. He then changed the con-

versation, and during the remainder of my stay talked as rationally and instructively as the most methodical old lecturer in the schools.

He bade me good-night with his usual politeness, and sent me away glad that my ill-timed mirth had not offended him. Yet the next morning I received a note saying he had decided to discontinue that particular series of researches in which I had given him such invaluable assistance.

I was somewhat nettled at this summary dismissal. Vargas asked me to his rooms no more, and he was not the man to call upon uninvited. So, except in the schools and in the streets, I saw nothing more of him.

It was predicted by those who should know best that Paul Vargas would be the scholar of the year. I alone dared to doubt it. In spite of his great talents and capacity for work, I fancied there was that in his nature which would defeat these high hopes. There was something wrong—something eccentric about him. In plain English, I believed, if not mad now, Vargas would end his days in a madhouse.

However, he never went up for his last examination. He had a surprise in store for us. Just before the final trial in which he was to reap such laurels he vanished. He went without a word of warning—went bag and baggage. He left no debts behind him. He defrauded no one. He simply, without giving any reason for his depart-

ure, went away and left no trace behind him. Some time afterward it was reported that he had come into a large fortune. This explanation of his conduct was a plausible one, and was generally accepted as correct.

After the nine days' wonder had died away I, like others, ceased to think about the missing man. The years went by, I passed my examination creditably, and was very proud and hopeful when duly authorized to place M.D. after my name.

I have narrated how I first met Paul Vargas. I had no expectation of again seeing him, nor any great wish to do so. But we met a second time. It was in this wise.

When I took my medical degree I was far from being the staid, sober man I now am. Having a little money of my own I resolved to see something of the world before I settled down. I was not rich enough to be quite idle, so I began by making one or two voyages as doctor to an emigrant ship. I soon grew tired of this occupation, and being in England, but not yet cured of roving, I cast about for something professional to take me abroad. I had not long to wait. Cholera was raging in the East. A fund had been raised to send out a few English doctors: I tendered my services, which were accepted.

At Constantinople I was detained several days waiting instructions. One day, while idly stroll-

ing through the streets, I came face to face with Paul Vargas.

Although he wore the fez and was in appearance more Turkish than English, I knew him at once and accosted him by his name. Surprised as he looked at my salutation, he had evidently no wish to deny his identity. As soon as he recognized me he greeted me cordially, and having learned what brought me to Constantinople, insisted that I should pay him a visit. I willingly consented to do so. I was most curious to ascertain why he had thrown up the profession so suddenly. The day being still young I started then and there with him for his home.

Naturally, almost my first question was why he left us so mysteriously.

"I had my reasons," he said.

"They must have been powerful ones."

He turned his dark eyes full upon me.

"They were," he said. "I grew sick of the life. After all, what did it mean? Work, work, work, only to find out how little one really knew or ever could know by study. Why, in one half-hour I learned more by pure chance than any one else has yet dreamed of."

I questioned him as to the meaning of his arrogant assertion, but he evaded me with all his old adroitness; then we reached his house, and I forgot all save admiration.

His house was just outside the city. House! it

might be called a small palace. Here he lived in true Oriental luxury. Judging from the profusion which surrounded him, and from the lavish scale on which his establishment was conducted, I felt sure that the report of his having inherited a fortune was quite correct. All that money could buy, all that an intellectual Sybarite could desire, seemed to be his. Books, paintings, statuary, costly furniture, rich tapestries, the choicest dishes, and the rarest wines. Only a man in the enjoyment of a princely income could live in such style and splendor.

He led me from room to room, until he opened the door to one more beautifully garnished than any of the others. A girl was sitting at the window. As we entered she sprang forward with a cry of joy, and threw her arms round Vargas.

He returned her passionate embrace; kissed her, whispered some words of love in a strange, musical language, then gently disengaging himself, said—

“Myrrha, welcome an old friend of mine, an Englishman.”

She turned toward me. Her beauty absolutely dazzled me. She was tall and majestic; coil upon coil of jet black hair crowned her well-poised queenly head. Her cheek had the clear brown tinge of the south. Her eyes were glorious. Never before had I seen such a splendid creature. The perfection of her form, the look of splendid



health and glowing vitality would have been enough to make her an object of the greatest interest to any one of my own profession.

The bright colors of her rich dress well became her. Although in years she was but a girl, the gold and jewels which covered her hands, arms, and neck, seemed quite in keeping with her beauty. As I looked at her I felt that Paul Vargas's earthly paradise ought to be complete.

She came forward with unembarrassed grace, smiled a bright smile, and giving me her hand, bade me welcome in English, correct enough, although tempered by a slight foreign accent.

After a little while Vargas suggested that I should walk round the gardens with him. As we left the room, the look that passed between him and the girl was quite enough to show the complete love they bore each other.

"Your wife, I suppose?" I said, when we were alone. "She is very beautiful."

"My love, my life, my very soul!" he exclaimed passionately. "But not my wife in your sense of the word."

I said no more, feeling the subject was a delicate one to handle. Who Myrrha was, or why she should live, unmarried, with him, was none of my business.

I had not been long in his society before I discovered that Paul Vargas was, in some ways, much changed—I may say improved. He seemed alto-

gether a better sort of fellow than the man I had known of old. No less polite, but more natural. His invariably charming manners were enhanced by the addition of something like friendliness. In an hour's time I felt that I had made more progress with him than I had in the whole of our previous intercourse. I attributed this change to the power of love, for, wife or no wife, it was plain that the man loved his beautiful companion with all the force of his strong nature.

Yet it shocked me to discover that all the old ambition was dead. I mourned that such a highly-gifted man could at his age withdraw completely from the battle-field, and seem only to strive to make life as soft and sensuous as it might be possible for wealth to make it. I spoke once or twice to this effect, but the darkness of his brow and the shortness of his answers told me I trod on forbidden ground. For his own sake I hoped that the day would come when he would weary of his voluptuous existence and long for the bracing tonics of hard work and the struggle for success.

I was detained in Constantinople three days longer. Vargas pressed me to take up my abode with him. It was not worth while to do this, as at any moment I might be ordered away. But I spent several hours of each day with him. He was always glad to see me. Perhaps the sweetness of his seclusion was already beginning to pall

upon him, and the occasional sight of a common-place, work-a-day face was a welcome one.

The route came at last. I bade my friend good-by, and sighed as I thought how grimly the scenes of death and misery to which I was about to pass would contrast with the Elysium I was quitting. Vargas accompanied me to the steamer by which the first part of the journey was to be made.

“Do you mean to live here all your life?” I asked.

“No, I shall grow weary of it—very soon, I expect.”

“And then?”

“Then I shall sell every thing and try another land.”

“You must be rich to live as you do.”

“I was rich. I had sixty thousand pounds—but in the last year or two I have spent two-thirds of my fortune.”

“Two-thirds of your capital! What folly!”

He shrugged his shoulders, and smiled that old superior smile. Then a deep gloom settled on his handsome face.

“I have plenty left—plenty to last my time,” he said.

“What nonsense you talk! What do you mean by your time?”

He leaned toward me, placed his hand on my arm, and looked at me with an expression in his eyes which thrilled me.

"I mean this," he said, slowly. "I could, if I chose, tell you the exact day—if not the exact hour at which I shall die. You see how I live, so can understand that if I have money to last my time, that time is short."

"My dear fellow!" I exclaimed, "have you any complaint—any secret malady?"

"None—I am hale and sound as you. Nevertheless I shall die as I have said."

His absolute conviction impressed me more than I cared to show. "A man must die of something specific," I said. "If you can predict your illness, can you not take steps to prolong your life?"

"Prolong my life!" he echoed as one in a dream. "Yes, I can prolong my life—but I will not."

I could only conclude that Paul Vargas meditated self-destruction.

"Why should you not care to live?" I urged.

"Care to live?" he cried bitterly. "Man, I revel in life! I have youth, strength, love—fame I could have if I wished for it. Yet it is because I may have fewer temptations to prolong my life that I am squandering my wealth—that I let ambition beckon in vain—that, when the moment draws near, I shall forsake the woman I love."

It was as I guessed years ago, Paul Vargas was mad!

He sank into moody silence, broken only

when the moment of my departure came. Then he roused himself, shook hands with me and bade me good speed.

"We shall meet again some day," I said cheerfully.

His dark eyes gleamed with all the old scorn they were wont to express when any one, whose words were not worth listening to, opposed him in argument.

"We shall meet no more," he said, curtly and coldly, turning away and retracing his steps.

He was wrong. We met again!

I worked through the cholera: saw many awful sights: gained much experience and a certain amount of praise. On my way home I inquired for Vargas, and found he had disposed of his house and its entire contents, departing no one knew whither.

Two years went by: I was still unsettled; still holding roving commissions. I blush to say that I had been attacked with the gold fever, and in my haste to grow rich had lost, in mining, nearly all I possessed. I cured myself before the disease grew chronic, but ashamed to return all but penniless to England, I sojourned for awhile in one of those mushroom towns of America—towns which spring up almost in a night, wherever there is a chance of making money.

I rather liked the life. It was rough but full of interest. The town held several thousand inhabi-

tants, so there was plenty of work for me and another doctor. If our patients were in luck we were well paid for our services; if, as was usually the case, they were out of luck, we received nothing and were not so foolish as to expect more. Still, taking one with another, I found the healing art paid me much better than mining. My studies of human nature were certainly extended at New Durham. I met with all sorts of characters, from the educated gentleman who had come out to win wealth by the sweat of his brow down to the lowest ruffian who lived by plundering his own kind, and my experiences were such that when I did return to England I was competent to write as an authority on the proper treatment of gunshot wounds.

One evening I met the other doctor. We were the best of friends. As our community was at present constituted there was no occasion for professional rivalry. Our hands were always full of work. Indeed, if we maneuvered at all against each other, it was with the view of shunting off a troublesome patient.

“I wish you'd look in at Webber's when you pass,” said Dr. Jones. “There's a patient of mine there. He's going to die, but for the life of me I can't tell what ails him.”

I promised to call and give my opinion on the case.

Webber's was a mixture of drinking bar, gam-

bling hell, and lodging-house. Its patrons were not of the most select class, and the scuffles and rows that went on there made the house a disgrace even to New Durham. By this time I was too well known to fear insult even in the lowest den of infamy, so I entered boldly and asked to be conducted to Dr. Jones's patient.

A blowsy, sodden-faced, vicious looking woman led me up stairs and turned the handle of a door.

"He ought to be dead by now," she said. "If the doctor can't cure him, or he don't die in two days, out he bundles."

I walked into the room, taking no notice of the brutal threat. There, on a wretched apology for a bed—with a look of heartrending despair in his large dark eyes, lay Paul Vargas!

I thought I must be dreaming. The man I had seen little more than two years ago, lapped in absurd luxury—spending money like water to gratify every taste, every desire—now lying in this wretched den, and if Jones's view of the case was correct, dying like a dog! I shuddered with horror and hastened to his side.

He knew me. He was conscious. I could tell that much by the light which leaped into his eyes as I approached.

"Vargas, my poor fellow," I said, "what does this mean?"

As I spoke I remembered how he had predicted his own death. He must have remembered it too,

for although he made no reply, and lay still as a log, there was a look in his eyes which might express the satisfaction felt by a successful prophet, when one who has laughed at his forecast is bound, at last, to realize its correctness.

I addressed him again and again. Not a word did he answer; so at last I was compelled to think that his power of speech was gone. Then I went to work to thoroughly inspect him and ascertain the nature of his complaint.

I sounded him, tested every organ, examined every limb; but like my colleague was utterly unable to find the cause of his illness. Of course I labored under the great disadvantage of being unable to get a word of description of his pains from the patient himself. I satisfied myself that he had absolutely lost the power of moving his limbs. This utter helplessness made me fancy the spine might be broken, but it was not so. Paralysis suggested itself, but the obviously clear state of the mind as shown by those eloquent eyes was sufficient to send this idea to the background. At last I gave up, fairly baffled. I could give no name to his ailment—could fix no seat for it.

His bodily weakness was great; but weakness must be caused by something. What was that something? So far as my knowledge went there was no specific disease; yet I was as certain as Dr. Jones that Paul Vargas, if not dying, was about to die.



And underneath us was the din of drunken men and unsexed women. Ribaldry and blasphemy, oaths and shrieks, laughter and shouts, rose and penetrated the frail planks which bounded the small, dirty room in which the sufferer lay. At all cost he must be moved to more comfortable quarters.

I went down stairs and questioned the Webbers as to how he came there. All they knew was that late one night the man entered the house and asked for a bed. He was accommodated with one, and for two days no one troubled about him. Then some one looked him up and found him in his present deplorable state. One of the inmates who had a grain of kindness left fetched Dr. Jones. That was all they knew of the affair.

I managed to secure the assistance of four strong and almost sober men. I paid what reckoning was due at Webber's, then set about removing the poor fellow. He was carried carefully down stairs, laid on an extemporized stretcher, and borne to my house, which fortunately, was only a few hundred yards away. During the transit he was perfectly conscious, but he spoke no word, nor, by any act of his own, moved hand or foot. I saw him safely installed in my own bed, and having satisfied myself that no immediate evil was likely to result from the removal, went out to look for some one to nurse him.

I was obliged to seek extraneous aid, as my

household consisted of an old negro who came of a morning to cook my breakfast and tidy up the place. Except for this I was my own servant.

Decent women in a place like New Durham are few and far between, but at last I found one to whom I thought I might venture to entrust my patient, and who, for a handsome consideration consented to act as sick-nurse. I took her back with me and instructed her to do what seemed to me best for the poor fellow. She was to give him, as often as he would take them, brandy and water and some nourishing spoon meat.

Vargas was now lying with his eyes shut. Except that he undoubtedly breathed he might be dead. I watched him for more than an hour, yet found his state a greater puzzle than ever. So utterly at sea I was that I dared not prescribe for him, fearing I might do more harm than good.

It was growing late. I had a long, hard day before me on the morrow. I had to ride many miles, and doubted whether I could get back the same day. Yet, late as it was, I did not retire to rest before I had thoroughly examined the clothes and other personal matters which I had brought from Webber's with the sick man. I hoped to come across the name of some friend to whom I could write and make his state known. Money or articles of value I had little expectation of finding—such things would soon disappear from the person of any one who lay dying at Webber's!

The only scrap of writing I met with was a letter in a woman's hand. It was short, and although every word showed passionate love, it ended in a manner which told me that a separation had taken place.

"You may leave me," it ran; "you may hide yourself in the furthest corner of the world: yet when the moment you know of comes and you need me, I shall find you. Till then farewell."

On the flyleaf was penciled, in Vargas's peculiar handwriting, "If I can find the strength of will to leave her, my beloved, surely I can die in secret and in silence."

There was no envelope, no date; no address; no signature to the letter. All it showed me was that Paul Vargas still clung to his morbid prophecy—that he had made up his mind he was to die, and it may be had been driven into his present state by his strange monomania. The mystery was—why should he leave the woman he loved and come here to die alone and uncared for? It was, of course, just possible that in some way he had learned I was in New Durham, and when illness overtook him was making his way to me.

This could only be explained by the man himself, and he was without power of speech.

After giving the nurse strict instructions to call me if her charge's condition showed any change, I went to the bed I had rigged up in my sitting

room, and in a minute was fast asleep. After I had slept for about three hours a knocking at my door aroused me. I opened it and found the nurse standing outside. Her bonnet and cloak were on, and by the light of the lamp she carried with a tremulous hand I saw that her face was ghastly pale, but nevertheless, wearing a defiant, injured look.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"I am going home," she said, sullenly.

"Going home! Nonsense! Go back to the sick room. Is the man worse?"

"I wouldn't go back for a hundred pounds—I'm going home."

Thinking some sudden whim had seized her I expostulated, and commanded, and entreated. She was inflexible. Then I insisted upon knowing the meaning of such extraordinary conduct. For a while she refused to give me any explanation. At last, she said she had been frightened to death. It was the man's eyes, she added, with a shiver. He had opened them and stared at her. The moment I heard this I ran to his room, fearing the worst. I found nothing to excite alarm; Vargas was quiet, apparently sleeping. So I returned to the stupid woman, rated her soundly, and bade her go back and resume her duties.

Not she! Horses would not drag her into that room again—money would not bribe her to re-enter it. The man had looked at her with those

fearful eyes of his until she felt that in another moment she must go mad or die. Why did she not move out of the range of his vision? She had done so; but it was all the same, she knew he was still looking at her—he was looking at her even now—she would never get away from that look until she was out of the house.

By this time the foolish creature was trembling like a leaf; and, moreover, had worked herself up to a pitch bordering on hysteria. Even if I could have convinced her of her folly, she would have been useless for nursing purposes, so I told her to get out of the house as soon as she liked; then, sulkily drawing on my clothes, went to spend the rest of the night by Vargas's bed.

His pulse still beat with feeble regularity. He seemed in want of nothing; so I placed a low chair near the bed and sat down. As I sat there my head was just on a level with his pillow. I watched the pale, still face for some time, then I fell into a doze. I woke, looked once more at Vargas, then again closed my eyes, and this time really slept; feeling sure that the slightest movement of his head on the pillow would arouse me, I did not struggle against drowsiness.

Presently I began to dream—a dream so incoherent that I can give no clear description of it. Something or some one was trying to overpower me, whether mentally or physically I can not say. I was resisting to the best of my ability, the final

struggle for mastery was just imminent, when, of course, I awoke—awoke to find Paul Vargas's luminous eyes, with strangely dilated pupils, gazing fully into mine. The whole strength of his mind, his very soul, seemed to be thrown into that fixed gaze.

I seemed to shrivel up and grow small beneath it. Those dark, masterful eyes, held me spellbound; fascinated me; deprived me of volition or power of motion; fettered me; forbade me even to blink an eyelid. With a strong, steady stroke they pierced me through and through, and I felt they meant to subjugate my mind even as they had already subjugated my body, and as their gaze grew more intense, I knew that in another moment I must be their slave!

With this thought my own thoughts faded. For a while all seemed dim, misty, and inexplicable, but even through the mist I see those two points glowing with dark, sustained fire. I can resist no longer, I am conquered, my will has quitted me and is another's!

Then thought came quickly enough. I am ill—dying in a strange place. There is one I love. She is miles and miles away; but not too far to reach me in time. A burning desire to write to her comes over me. I must and will write to her before it is too late! Yet I curse myself for the wish as in some dim way I know that some fearful thing must happen if she finds me alive.

Then all consciousness leaves me except that I have the impression I am out of doors and can feel the night air on my brow. Suddenly I come to myself. I am standing, bareheaded, close to the post-office, with a kind of idea in my bewildered brain that I have just posted a letter. I feel battered and shaken, large beads of perspiration are on my forehead. In a dazed way I walk back to my house, the door of which I find left wide open—an act of trustfulness scarcely due to New Durham. I enter, throw myself into a chair, and shudder at what has taken place.

No—not at what has taken place, but at what might have taken place. For I know that Paul Vargas, although speechless and more helpless than an infant, has by the exercise of some strange, weird mental power so influenced me that I have identified myself with him, and done as he would have done. His unspoken commands may have worked no evil, but I shudder as I feel sure that had he ordered me, while in that mesmeric state, to murder my best friend, I should have done so.

It was only when annoyance and anger succeeded fear, I found myself able to return to him. I felt much mortified that I, in the full vigor of manhood, had been conquered and enslaved by the act of a stronger will than my own. I went back to the sick-room, and found Vargas lying with closed eyes. I laid my hand on his shoulder, bent down to his ear and said—

“When you recover I will have a full explanation of the jugglery you have practiced upon me.”

I resumed my seat, fearing his strange power no longer. Now that I knew he wielded it I was armed against it. I flattered myself that only by attacking me unawares could he influence me in so mysterious a manner. When next he opened his eyes I did not shun them. I might well have done so—their expression was one of anguish and horror—the expression one might imagine would lurk in the eyes of a conscience-stricken man to whom had just come the knowledge that he had committed some awful crime. Every now and then they turned to me in wild, beseeching terror, but they bore no trace of that strange mesmeric power.

Paul Vargas, if he was to die, seemed doomed to die a lingering death. For some ten days longer he lay in that curious state—his symptoms, or rather absence of symptoms, driving Jones and myself to our wits' end. We tried all we could think of without beneficial results. Every day he grew a little weaker—every day his pulse was rather feebler than on the preceding day. Such stimulant and nutriment as I could force down his throat seemed to do no good. Slowly—very slowly—his life was ebbing away, but so surely that I was fain to come to the sad conclusion that in spite of all our efforts he would



slip through our fingers. By this time he had grown frightfully emaciated, and although I am convinced he suffered little or no bodily pain, the look of anguish in his staring dark eyes was positively painful to encounter.

I had obtained the services of another nurse, and was thankful to find that, to her, the dying man was not an object of dread; although after my own experiences, I could not blame her predecessor.

Hour after hour, day after day, Paul Vargas lay, unable to move or speak; yet I felt sure in full possession of his mental faculties. Several times I noticed when the door was opened, a look of dread come into his eyes. He breathed freer when he saw that the new-comer was either the nurse or myself. This puzzled me, for if, as I suspected, he had willed that I should write a letter and send it to the proper place, his look should have been one of hope and expectancy, instead of its displaying unmistakable signs of fear.

Although Vargas often gave me the impression that he was trying to subject me again to that strange influence, it was only once more that he attained any thing like success. One day, grown bold at finding I had as yet avoided a repetition of my thralldom, and, perhaps, egged on by curiosity, I met his strange fixed gaze half-way and defied him to conquer me. In a moment or two I found I had miscalculated my powers, and—

although I blush to say it—I felt that in another second I must yield to him, and as before, do all he wished. At that critical moment the nurse entered the room and spoke to me. Her voice and presence broke the spell. Thank God, it was so; Vargas was sending an impulse into my mind—urging me in some way which I knew would be irresistible—to perform, not some harmless task, but to go to my medicine chest and fetch a dose of laudanum heavy enough to send him to sleep forever. And I say, without hesitation, that had the woman not entered the room at that very moment, I should have been forced to do the man's bidding.

Yet I had no wish to cut his few last days short. If I had given him that poison, it would have been suicide, not murder!

Although he had predicted his own death, why was Paul Vargas so anxious to die that he had endeavored to make me kill him? Unless their tortures are unbearable, few dying persons seek to precipitate matters; and this one, I am sure, suffered little or no pain. His death was lingering and tedious, but not painful.

After this fresh attempt to coerce me I was almost afraid to leave him alone with the nurse. I even took the precaution of being present when Dr. Jones, out of professional curiosity, paid him an occasional visit.

The tension on my nerves grew unbearable.

I prayed fervently for the man's recovery, or, if recovery was out of the question, for his death. At last the time came when the latter seemed to be drawing very, very near—so near that Jones, whose interest in the case was unabated, said, as he left me in the evening—

“He will die to-night, or before to-morrow is over. I believe he has only kept himself alive the last few days by sheer force of will and determination not to die.”

I assented gloomily, wished my colleague good-night, and went to rest.

Next morning, just after breakfast, I heard a rap at my door. I opened it, and found myself face to face with a woman. She was tall, and even the long black cloak she wore did not hide the grace and symmetry of her figure. A thick veil covered her face. Thinking she had come for advice, I begged her to enter the house.

I led her to my sitting-room. She raised her veil and looked at me. I knew her in a moment. She was the lovely girl who had shared with Vargas that luxurious eastern paradise—the girl whom he called Myrrha.

She looked pale and weary, but still very beautiful. Her somber attire could not diminish her charms. My one thought as I gazed at her was, how any man, of his own free will, could tear himself from such a creature. Yet, for some unknown reason, Paul Vargas had done so.

It was clear that I was entirely forgotten. No start of recognition showed that my face was any thing but that of a stranger. I did not wonder at this; I was much changed; bronzed and bearded; was, in fact, as rough-looking a customer as many of my own patients.

For a moment she seemed unable to speak. Her eyes looked at mine as though they would anticipate what I had to tell her. Her lips trembled, but no words came from them.

At last she spoke. "There is a gentleman here—dying."

"Yes," I replied, "Mr. Vargas is here."

"Am I in time—is he still alive?"

"He is very, very ill, but still alive."

A wretch reprieved on the scaffold could not have displayed more delight than did Myrrha when she heard my words. A look of indescribable joy flashed into her face. She clasped her hands in passionate thankfulness and tears of rapture filled her eyes. Poor girl, she had little enough to rejoice at! She was in time—in time for what? To see her lover die. That was all!

"Take me to him at once," she said, moving toward the door.

I suggested a little rest and refreshment first. She declined both, peremptorily.

"Not a moment must be wasted. I have traveled night and day since I received his letter. Quick, take me to him, or it may be too late!"

I asked her to follow me. She threw off her long cloak, and I saw that her dress beneath it was plain black. No ribbon, jewel, or ornament broke its sable lines. With a look of ineffable joy on her face she followed me to Vargas's room.

"Let me go first and prepare him," I said.

"No," she replied, sternly. "Let me pass."

She laid her hand on the door, opened it, and preceded me into the room.

Paul Vargas's eyes were turned—as, indeed, they had for the last few days been mostly turned—toward the door; yet the look which leaped into them was not one of joy and welcome. It was a look of woe—of supreme agony. A convulsive shudder ran across his face, and I expected his next breath would be his last.

Why should the advent of his beautiful visitor so affect him? Had he treated this woman so evilly, that he dreaded lest she came to his death-bed to heap reproaches on his head? Yet he himself had summoned her—brought her from afar—by the letter which he had willed me to write.

Injured or not, Myrrha came to console, not reproach. My doubts on this point were at once set at rest. With a cry of passionate grief she threw herself on her knees beside the bed, clasped the poor wasted hand in hers, and covered it with kisses. In a strange tongue, one unknown to me, she spoke words which I knew were words of fer-

vent love. The musical voice, the thrilling accent, the gestures she used, were interpreters sufficient to make me understand that she was rejoicing that death had spared her lover long enough for her to see him once more.

A soft look, a look that echoed her own, came over the sufferer's face—a look of infinite tenderness and deathless love. But it was transient. His eyes grew stern. I fancied they tried to drive her away; then, as she heeded not his commands, they besought and appealed to her. In vain—the strange girl laughed joyfully as a bride who welcomes her bridegroom. She kissed her lover again and again. Then, with a weary sigh, Paul Vargas closed his eyes—never, I thought, to reopen them. I went to his side.

He was not dead, but he bore infallible signs of approaching dissolution. Practically, it was of little moment whether he died now or in an hour's time. Nothing could save him. Still, the wish one always feels to prolong the faintest flicker of life prompted me to speak to Myrrha.

"The excitement will kill him," I whispered.

She sprang to her feet as if stung. She threw at me a glance so full of horror that I started. Then, bending over Vargas, she satisfied herself that he still breathed.

"Go," she whispered fiercely. "Leave me alone with my love. Take that woman with you."

I hesitated. I wanted to see the end. But I could not dispute the sacred claims of love and grief, or help sympathizing with the girl in her desire to be alone with the dying man. My duties were ended. I had done all I could, but death in his present mysterious garb had conquered me. The man must die. How could he die better than in the arms of the woman he loved?

I motioned to the nurse to leave the room. I followed her through the door; then turned to take my last look at Paul Vargas.

He was lying apparently unconscious. Myrrha had thrown herself on the bed by his side. His poor pale face was drawn close to her full, red lips. Her bosom beat against his. Her arms were wreathed around him, holding him to her. The contrast between life and death—between the rich, strong, glowing life of the young girl, and that of the man now ebbd away to its last few sands, was startling. I closed the door reverently. My eyes filled with tears, and I sighed for the sorrow which was about to fall on the devoted, passionate creature. How would she bear it! Then I went about my duties, knowing that when I returned home I should have a patient the less.

I rode a few miles into the country, to see a miner who had met with an accident which would most likely prove fatal. Just as I reached his cabin my horse fell suddenly lame. I led him the rest of the way, and, having done all I could for

the injured man, started to return home. There was nothing for it but to leave my horse to be fetched the next day, and walk back to New Durham.

I strode on as briskly as the nature of the track would allow. As I trudged along I thought of Myrrha and Paul Vargas, and wondered if by any chance I should find him alive on my return. I was so pre-occupied with these thoughts that, not until I was close to him, did I notice a man lying on the side of the track.

At first I thought it was one of the common sights of the neighborhood, a man dead drunk; but as I stood over him I found, for a wonder, it was not so. The man's back was toward me; his face was buried in the herbage; but I could hear him sobbing as if his heart was about to burst. As he lay there he threw his arms out with wild gestures of despair—he dug his fingers into the ground, and tore at it as one racked by an unbearable torture. He was evidently a prey to some fearful bodily or mental distress. Whichever it might be, I could not pass without proffering my assistance.

His agitation was so great that he had no idea of my proximity. I spoke, but my words fell unheeded. Sob after sob burst forth from him.

I stooped and placed my hand on his arm. "My poor fellow," I said, "what is the matter?"

At my touch he sprang to his feet. God of



Heaven! shall I ever forget that moment? Before me stood Paul Vargas, well and strong, as when we parted some years ago in Constantinople!

What saved me from fainting I can not tell. The man stood there before me—the very man I had left an hour or two ago at his last gasp! He stood there and cast a shadow. He did not fade away or disappear as a vision or hallucination should do. There was life and strength in every limb. His face was pale, but it was with the pallor of grief: for, even now the tears were running from his eyes, and he was wringing his hands in agony.

Speak! I could not have fashioned a word. My tongue clave to my palate. My lips were parched and dry. All I could do was to stare at him, with chattering teeth, bristling hair, and ice-cold blood.

He came to my side. He grasped my arm. He was still flesh and blood. Even in that supreme moment his strong convulsive clutch told me that. He spoke. His voice was as the voice of a living man, yet as the voice of one from whom all joy of life has departed.

“Go home!” he said. “Go home, and learn how the strongest may tremble at death—at what a cost he will buy life—how the selfish desire to live can conquer love. You asked me once if I could not prolong life. You are answered. You brought her to me—you yielded then, but not the

second time, when I would have undone the deed. Go home, before I kill you."

Something in his whole bearing struck me with deadly terror—a natural, human terror. I turned and fled for my life, until my limbs refused to bear me further. Then I sank on the ground, and, I believe, lost consciousness.

When I recovered I made the best of my way home, telling myself as I went along that overwork and want of sleep were acting on me. I had dreamed an absurd, horrible dream. Nevertheless I trembled in every limb as I opened the door of the room in which I had left Paul Vargas, dying in the arms of the woman who loved him.

Death had been there during my absence. I knew the meaning of that long shapeless form stretched out on the bed, covered by the white sheet. Yet I trembled more and more. The words I had heard in my supposed dream came to me clear and distinct. It was some time before I could summon courage enough to move the covering from the dead face. I did so at last, and I believe, shrieked aloud.

Lying there in her black funereal dress, her fair hands crossed on her breast, her waxen face still bearing a smile, lay the girl whom I only knew by the name of Myrrha—dead.

## A DEAD MAN'S FACE.

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**I**MAGINATIVE beings who invent marvelous tales may take what license they please, but a simple narrator is nothing if not accurate; so, before beginning this, I looked up old correspondences and various memoranda made at the time when the following things occurred. The first paper upon which I put my hand was a letter. I may as well open with a copy of it:

“DEAR OLD BOY.—I have met her at last—my fate—the one woman in the world for me. Nothing is settled as yet; but I should not write this unless hope were a certainty. You must wish me joy, although she is a widow and an American—two qualifications which I know you will find fault with. No matter; when you see her you will recant and be envious. Yours ever,

“CLAUD MORTON.”

The writer was my brother—I was going to say my only brother, but I had another once, although

the less said about him the better. Nearly every family has its black sheep. Ours had been a peculiarly sable one. When he died, some years ago, I passed a sponge over his long list of delinquencies, and tried to think of him as kindly as possible. He died a disgraced man, far away from home.

I call this black sheep, Stephen, my brother, not Claud's, the fact being that Claud can scarcely be said to have known him. I stood in age midway between the two. Claud was sixteen years younger than Stephen, so that when the latter was shipped off as irreclaimable, the former was a little golden-haired fellow of seven.

The above letter made me feel both glad and sorry. I was glad that the boy—he was still the boy to me, although his age was seven-and-twenty—was going to be married; but I was sorry that his choice had not fallen on one of his own countrywomen, and one who could have given him her first love. Still, all this was his own peculiar business. No doubt he had made a suitable choice, and the only thing left for me to do was to write him a cheerful letter of congratulation, and hope that his love affairs would soon be happily settled.

A week went by; then came a long letter from him. He had proposed in orthodox form, and had been duly accepted. His letter lies before me at this moment, and I feel sad as I read again

the two pages covered with the lover's usual raptures.

I am not a mercenary man, but I own I felt somewhat disappointed on learning that she was poor. Somehow one associates wealth with an American widow who is sojourning in England. But, so far as I could gather from Claud's letter, Mrs. Despard, or Judith, as he called her, was not well off. He spoke of her as being all alone in London, which fact, he added, would necessarily hasten his marriage. It would take place, he hoped, in a week or two. In conclusion he pressed me to run up to town in order to make the acquaintance of my future sister-in-law.

I was very busy at the time—I may say, in passing, that my business is to cure people's ailments, not to tell stories—nevertheless I managed to pay a flying visit to town, and was duly presented to Claud's betrothed.

Yes, she was handsome—strikingly handsome. Her whole appearance was much out of the common. She was tall, superbly built, on a large scale, perhaps, yet graceful as a panther in every movement. Her face gave evidence of much character, power, and determination, and of passion also, I decided. Her rich dark beauty was at that time in full bloom, and although I saw at a glance that she was some years older than my brother, I was not at all inclined to blame Claud for his rapturous expressions. So far as personal charms

went, I could find no fault with Judith Despard. For the rest it was easy to see that she was passionately in love with Claud, and for the sake of this I gladly overlooked all my fanciful objections to his choice, and congratulated him heartily on having won so beautiful a creature.

Yet, strange to say, in the midst of his new-found happiness my brother seemed any thing but his usual cheerful self. He, the merriest and most talkative of men, seemed taciturn, moody and preoccupied. The curious thing was that his changed manner struck me particularly while we were in Mrs. Despard's company. He spoke and behaved in the most affectionate and lover-like way, but there was in his general bearing something which puzzled me altogether. It seemed to me that he might perhaps be nervous as to what impression his fair friend might make upon the elder brother whom he so revered and respected.

This theory of mine was strengthened by the fact that when, at night, we found ourselves alone and I was able to freely express my admiration of Mrs. Despard's good looks, he brightened up considerably, and we sat until a very late hour, and talked over the past, the present and the future.

"When do you mean to be married?" I asked.

"In a fortnight or three weeks. There is nothing to wait for. Judith is living alone in lodgings.

She has no friends to consult, so we shall just walk to church some morning and get it over."

"Well, let me walk with you. I should like to see the last of you."

"All right, old fellow. But you'll be the only one—unless Mary likes to honor us."

Mary was my wife; but as her time was just then fully occupied by a very young baby, I did not think it at all likely she would be able to make the long journey to town.

"I shall fix the earliest day I can," added Claud. "The fact is, I have been feeling rather queer lately. I want a change."

Thereupon I questioned him as to what ailed him. So far as I could ascertain, all that was the matter was his having worked too hard, and being a little below par. I prescribed a tonic, and quite agreed with him as to the benefit which he would derive from change of air.

When I reached home my wife scolded me for my stupidity. It seems that it was my duty to have found out all about Mrs. Despard's antecedents, relations, connections, circumstances, habits and disposition, whereas all I could say was that she was a beautiful widow with a small income and that she and Claud were devoted to each other.

"Yes," said Mrs. Morton, scornfully, "like all other men, the moment you see a pretty face you inquire no further. I quite tremble for Claud."

When I reflected how little I really knew about Mrs. Despard, I felt abashed and guilty. However, Claud was a full-grown man, and no fraternal counsel was likely to turn him aside from his desire.

In the course of a few days he wrote me that he was to be married on the 5th of the next month. I made arrangements which would enable me to go to the wedding; but three days before the date named I heard again from him. The wedding was postponed for a fortnight. He gave no reason for the delay; but he said he was anxious to see me, and to-morrow he should run down to my home.

He came as promised. I was aghast when I saw him. He looked worn, haggard, wretched. My first thought was that business had gone wrong with him. His looks might well be those of a man on the brink of ruin. After the first greeting I at once took him to my study in order to be put out of suspense. Just as I was about to begin my anxious questions he turned to me.

"Frank, old fellow," he said, imploringly, and with a faint attempt at a smile, "don't laugh at me."

Laugh! That was the last thing I was likely to do. I pressed his hand in silence.

"You won't believe me, I know," he continued. "I can't believe it myself. Frank, I am haunted."

"Haunted!" I was bound to smile, not from



any disposition toward merriment, but in order to show the poor boy the absurdity of his idea.

"Yes, haunted. The word sounds ridiculous, but I can use no other. Haunted."

"What haunts you?"

He came close to me and grasped my arm. His voice sank to a hoarse whisper.

"A horrible, ghastly, grewsome thing. It is killing me. It comes between me and my happiness. I have fought and struggled against this phantom terror. I have reasoned calmly with myself. I have laughed my own folly to scorn. In vain—in vain. It goes, but it comes again."

"Overwork," I said, "insomnia, too many cigars, late hours; and had you been a drinking man I should add, too much stimulant, too little food, anxiety, perhaps. Have you any thing on your mind—any special worry?"

"Of course I have," he said, pettishly. "Did I not tell you it is killing me?"

"What is killing you?"

He rose and paced the room excitedly; then suddenly he stopped short, and once more clutched my arm.

"A face," he said, wildly—"a man's face; a fearful white face that comes to me; a horrible mask, with features drawn as in agony—ghastly, pale, hideous! Death or approaching death, violent death, written in every line. Every feature distorted. Eyes starting from the head.

Every cord in the throat standing out, strained as by mortal struggle. Long dark hair lying flat and wet. Thin lips moving and working—lips that are cursing, although I hear no sound. Why should this come to me—why to me? Who is this dead man whose face wrecks my life? Frank, my brother, if this is disease or madness, cure me; if not, let me die.”

His words, his gestures, sent a cold thrill through me. He was worse, far worse, than I had feared.

“Claud,” I said, “you are talking nonsense. Cure you! of course I mean to cure you. Now sit down, collect yourself, and tell me how this hallucination comes.”

“Comes! How does it come? It gathers in corners of the room; it forms and takes shape; it glares at me out of the wall; it looks up at me from the floor. Ever the same fearful white dying face, threatening, cursing, sometimes mocking. Why does it come?”

I had already told the poor fellow why it came, but it was no use repeating my words. “Tell me when you see it,” I asked; “at night—in darkness?”

He hesitated, and seemed troubled. “No, never at night. In broad daylight only. That to me is the crowning terror, the ghastliness of it. At night I could call it a dream. Frank, believe me, I am no weak fool. For weeks I have borne

with this. At last it has conquered me. Send it away, or I shall go mad!"

"I'll send it away, old boy, never fear. Tell me: can you see it now?"

"No; thank God, not now."

"Have you seen it to-day?"

"No; to-day I have been free from it."

"Well, you'll be free from it to-morrow, and the next day, and the next. It will be gone forever before you leave me. Now come and see Mary and the babies. I haven't even asked you how Mrs. Despard is."

A curious look crossed his face. "I think she grows more beautiful every day," he said. Then he seized my hand. "Oh, Frank," he exclaimed, "rid me of this horror, and I shall be the happiest man in the world."

"All right," I answered, perhaps with more confidence than I felt.

Although I made light of it to my patient, his state greatly alarmed me. I hastened to put him under the strictest and most approved treatment. I enforced the most rigid sumptuary laws, made him live on plain food, and docked his consumption of tobacco unmercifully. In a few days I was delighted to find that my diagnosis of the case was correct. Claud was rapidly recovering tone. In a week's time he seemed restored to health.

The days went by. As yet Claud had said

nothing about leaving me; yet, unless the date was once more adjourned, he was to be married on the 19th. I did not counsel him to postpone the happy day. He was by now so well that I thought he could not do better than adhere to his arrangement. A month's holiday, spent in the society of the woman he loved, would, I felt certain, complete his cure, and banish forever that grisly intruder begotten of disorganized nerves.

From the monotonous regularity and voluminous nature of their correspondence it was evident, delay and separation notwithstanding, that matters were going on quite smoothly between Claud and Judith Despard. Every day he received and wrote a long letter. Nevertheless, it was not until the 16th of the month that I knew exactly what he meant to do about his marriage.

"Frank," he said, "you have been wonderfully kind to me. I believe you have saved my life, or at least my reason. Will you do something more for me?"

"Even unto half my kingdom," I answered.

"Look here: I am ashamed of the feeling, but I absolutely dread returning to town. At any rate I wish to stay there no longer than is needful. Thursday morning I must, of course, be there, to be married. You think me cured, Frank?" he added, abruptly.

"Honestly, yes. If you take care of yourself you will be troubled no more."

"Yet why do I dread London so? Well, never mind. I will go up by the night mail on Wednesday—then I need only be there for a few hours. Will you do this for me—go up on Wednesday morning, see Judith, and explain how it is that I shall not see her until we meet in the church?"

"Certainly, if you wish it. But you had better write as well."

"Yes, I shall do that. There are several other little things you must see to for me. The license I have, but you must let the clergyman know. You had better go and see my partners. They may think it strange if I marry and go away without a word."

Thinking it better that he should have his own way, I promised to do as he wished. Upon my arrival in town on Wednesday afternoon I went straight to Mrs. Despard's. I was not sorry to have this opportunity of seeing her alone. I wished to urge upon her the necessity of being careful that Claud did not again get into that highly wrought nervous state, from which my treatment had so happily extricated him.

She was not looking so well as when last I saw her. At times her manner was restless, and she seemed striving to suppress agitation. She made no adverse comments on her lover's strange whim of reaching town to-morrow only in time for the ceremony. Her inquiries as to his health were

most solicitous, and when I told her that I no longer feared any thing on his account, her heartfelt sigh of relief told me how deeply she loved him.

Presently she looked me full in the face. Her eyes were half closed, but I could see an anxious, eager look in them. "He saw a face," she said. "Has it left him?"

"He told you of his queer hallucination, then?"

"No; but once or twice when sitting with me he sprang to his feet and muttered: 'Oh, that face! that ghastly, horrible face! I can bear it no longer!' Then he rushed wildly from the room. What face did he see, Dr. Morton?"

To set her mind at rest, I gave her a little scientific discourse, which explained to her how such mental phenomena were brought about. She listened attentively, and seemed satisfied. Then I bade her adieu until to-morrow.

The marriage was to be of the quiet kind. I found that Mrs. Despard had made no arrangement for any friend to accompany her; so, setting all rules of etiquette at defiance, I suggested that, although the bridgroom's brother, I should call for her in the morning and conduct her to the church. To this she readily consented.

Somehow that evening I did not carry away such a pleasing impression of my brother's bride as I did when first I met her. I can give no reason for this, except that I was not forgetful of

my wife's accusation, that when first I met Judith Despard I had been carried away by the glamour of her beauty, and thought of nothing else. As I walked to Claud's rooms, which I occupied for the night, I almost regretted that he had been so hasty—certainly I wished that we knew more of his bride. But it was now too late for regrets or wishes.

I called for Mrs. Despard at the appointed hour, and found her quite ready to start. Her dress was plain and simple—I can not describe it; but I saw that in spite of her excessive pallor she looked very beautiful. In the carriage on our way to the church she was very silent, answering my remarks with monosyllables. I left her in peace, supposing that at such a moment every woman must be more or less agitated.

When the carriage drew up at the church door, the bride laid her hand upon my arm. I could feel that she was trembling. "Claud will be here?" she asked. "Nothing will stop him?"

"Nothing. But I may as well step out and see that he is waiting."

Yes, Claud was in the church waiting for us. We exchanged greetings. The old sexton summoned the curate; and Judith Despard, my brother, and myself walked up to the altar rails.

Claud looked very well that morning; a little fagged perhaps, but the long night journey would account for that. He certainly looked proud and

happy as he stood on the altar step side by side with the woman who in a few minutes would be his wife.

But before the curate had finished reading the opening address a great change came over him. From where I was standing I could see only his side face, but that was enough to show me that he was suffering from some agitation—something far above the nervousness so often displayed by a bridegroom. A deadly pallor came over his face, small beads of perspiration sprang to his brow, and I noticed that those tell-tales of mental disturbance, the hands, were so tightly clinched that the knuckles grew white. It was evident that he was suffering anguish of some kind, and for a moment I thought of stopping the service. But the rite is but a short one, and from whatever cause Claud's agitation might proceed, it was perhaps better to trust to him to curb it for a few moments than to make a scene. Nevertheless I watched him intently and anxiously.

Then came the charge to declare any impediment. As the curate made the conventional pause, Claud, to my surprise, glanced round in a startled way, as if fearing that his marriage would at the last moment be forbidden. The look on his face was now one of actual terror.

Both bride and bridegroom said their "I wills" in such low tones that I could scarcely hear their voices. Then, in pursuance of my duty, I gave



the woman to the priest. He joined the hands of Claud and Judith.

After having played my little part I had not moved back to my former station. I was now close to the bride, and as Claud turned to her, could see his face to advantage. It was positively distorted with suppressed emotion of some kind. His mouth was set, and I could see that his teeth were closed on his under lip. He did not look at his fair bride. His gaze passed over her shoulder. In fact, he seemed almost oblivious to her presence. I was dreadfully frightened.

The clergyman's voice rang out: "I, Claud, take thee, Judith, to my wedded wife." Then, hearing no echo of his words, he paused.

"Repeat after me," he prompted. Again he began, "I, Claud—"

But his voice was drowned in a louder one, which rang through the empty church. With a fierce cry, as of inexpressible rage, Claud had thrown the bride's hand from him, and was pointing and gesticulating toward the wall, upon which his eyes had been riveted.

"Here!—even here!" he almost shrieked. "That cursed, white, wicked, dying face! Whose is it! Why does it come between me and my love! Mad! Mad! I am going mad!"

I heeded not the clergyman's look of dismay, or the bride's cry of distress. I thought of nothing but my unfortunate brother. Here, at the

moment which should be the happiest he had yet known, the grewsome hallucination had come back to him. I threw my arm round him and tried to calm him.

"It is fancy, dear boy," I said. "In a moment it will be gone."

"Gone! Why does it come? What have I to do with this dying man? Look, Frank, look! Something tells me if you look you will see it. There! there! Look there!

His eyes were ever fixed on the same point. He grasped my arm convulsively. I am ashamed to say that I yielded, and looked in the direction of his gaze.

"There is nothing there," I said, soothingly.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "It will come to you as to me."

It may have been the hope of convincing Claud of the illusionary nature of the sight which tormented him, it may have been some strange fascination wrought by his words and manner, which made me for some moments gaze with him. God of heaven! I saw gradually forming out of nothing, gathering on the blank wall in front of me, a face, or the semblance of a face, white, ghastly, horrible! Long, dank, wet-looking dark hair, eyes starting from their sockets, lips working--the whole appearance that of the face of a man who is struggling with death: in every detail as Claud had described it. And yet to me that

face was more terrible than ever it could be to Claud.

I gazed in horror. I felt my eyes growing riveted to the sight as his own. I felt my whole frame trembling. I knew that in another moment I should be raving as wildly as he raved. Only his hoarse whisper recalled me to my senses.

"You see?" he asked, or rather asserted.

Horror forced the truth from me. "I see, or fancy I see," I answered.

With a wild laugh Claud broke from me. He rushed down the church and disappeared. As he left me, the face, thank Heaven! faded from the wall, or from my imagination.

I turned to my companions. Judith Despard was lying in a dead swoon on the altar steps; the curate with trembling hands was loosening the throat of her dress. I called for water. The sexton brought it. I bathed the poor woman's temples, and in a few minutes she sighed, opened her eyes, and then shuddered. I took her in my arms and staggered to the church door. The curate removed his surplice and followed me. I placed my almost senseless burden in the carriage.

"For Heaven's sake, see her home," I said to the curate. "I must go and look after my brother. As soon as I have seen him I will come round to Mrs. Despard's. Get her home quickly. The coachman knows where to go."

The brougham drove off. I threw myself into

a cab, and drove toward Claud's rooms. I hoped he might have gone straight there.

To my great relief, when I reached his house he was on the door-step. We entered his room together; he sank wearily into a chair, and buried his face in his hands. I was scarcely less agitated than himself, and my face, as I caught its reflection in the mirror, was as white as his own. I waited for him to speak.

Presently he raised his head. "Go to her," he said. "Ask her why that face comes between us. You saw it—even you. It can be no fancy of mine. Tell her we can meet no more."

"I will wait until you are calmer before I go."

"Calm! I am myself now. The thing has left me, as it always does. Frank, I have hidden from you one peculiarity of my state. That awful face never shows itself to me unless I am in her company. Even at the altar it came between us. Go to her; ask her why it comes."

I left him, but did not quit the house for some time. I went into an adjoining room and tried to collect my thoughts; for, as I said, my mind was more troubled than even Claud's could be.

I am ashamed to re-assert it; I am willing to own that excitement, my brother's impressive manner, superstition which I did not know I possessed—any thing that may bear a natural explanation—may have raised that vision. But why should that phantom, gathering and growing

from nothing until it attained to form, or at least semblance, have been the face of one I had known? Why should the features distorted in deadly agony have been those of my brother Stephen? For his was the dreadful face which Claud's prompting or my own imagination had raised.

Almost like one in a dream I went to do Claud's bidding. I was thankful, upon reaching Mrs. Despard's, to find that she had gone to her room, and left word that she could see no one to-day. This gave me time to consider the position.

Acting on a sudden impulse, I went to the telegraph office, and sent instructions to my wife to forward to me, by passenger train, a small box in which I kept old letters and papers. Then I went back to Claud, and after some persuasion induced him to leave town at once. I told him I would arrange every thing on the morrow. He was better away.

In the morning my box arrived. In it I found what I wanted. After the calming effects of a night's rest I felt ashamed of my weakness as I drew from old letters a photograph of my brother Stephen—one taken about two years before the report of his death reached us. Nevertheless I put the portrait in my pocket, and about noon went to Mrs. Despard's.

I was at once admitted, and in a few minutes she came to me. She looked worn and haggard, as if sleep had not visited her for nights. Dark

circles had formed round her fine eyes; lines seemed to have deepened round her firm, passionate mouth. She advanced eagerly toward me and held out her hand. I took it in silence. Indeed, I scarcely knew what to say or how to act.

"Where is Claud?" she asked, in a quick voice, but scarcely above a whisper.

"He has left town for a few days."

She pressed her hand to her heart. "Does that mean I shall see him no more?"

"I am afraid I must say it does. He thinks it better you should part."

She gave a sharp cry, and walked up and down the room wringing her hands. Her lips moved rapidly, and I knew she was muttering many words, but in so low a key that I could not catch their meaning. Suddenly she stopped, and turned upon me fiercely.

"Is this by your council and advice?" she demanded.

"No. It is his own unbiassed decision."

"Why?—tell me why? He loved me—I love him. Why does he leave me?"

The passionate entreaty of her voice is indescribable. What could I say to her? Words stuck in my throat. It seemed the height of absurdity for a sane man to give a sane woman the true reason for Claud's broken faith. I stammered out something about his bad state of health.

"If he is ill, I will nurse him," she cried. "I will wait for years if he will give me hope. Dr. Morton, I love Claud as I never before loved a man."

She clasped her hands and looked imploringly into my face. In a mechanical way I drew the portrait of my dead brother from my breast. She saw the action.

"His likeness!" she cried, joyfully. "He sends it to me! Ah, he loves me!"

I handed her the photograph. "Mrs. Despard," I asked, "do you know—"

I did not finish the question, yet it was fully answered. Never, I believe, save then did a human face undergo such a sudden, frightful change. The woman's very lips grew ashen, her eyes glared into mine, and I saw them full of dread. She staggered—all but fell.

"Why is it here—who is it?" she gasped out.

I was a prey to the wildest excitement. To what revelation was this tending? what awful thing had I to learn?

"Listen," I said, sternly. "Woman, it is for you to answer the question. It is the face of this man, his dying face, that comes between you and your lover."

"Tell me his name." I read rather than heard the words her dry lips formed.

"The name he was once known by was Stanley."

A quick, sharp shudder ran through her. For a moment I thought she was going to faint.

"He is dead," she said. "Why does he come between my love and me? Others have loved or said they loved me since then. They saw no dead faces. Had I loved them I might have married and been happy. Claud, I love. Why does the dead man trouble him?"

"That man," I replied, "was my brother—Claud's brother."

She threw out her arms with a gesture of utter despair. "Your brother—Claud's brother!" she repeated. Then she fixed her eyes on mine as if she would read the secrets of my soul.

"You are lying," she said.

"I am not. He was our eldest brother. He left England years ago. He passed under a false name. He died. When and how did he die?"

She sank, a dead weight, into a chair; but still she looked at me like one under a spell. I seized her wrist.

"Tell me, woman," I cried—"tell me what this man was to you; why his dying face comes to us? The truth—speak the truth."

She seemed to cower beneath my words, but her eyes were still on my face. "Speak!" I cried, fiercely, and tightening my grasp upon her wrist. At last she found words.

"He was my husband; I killed him," she said in a strange voice, low yet perfectly distinct.



I recoiled in horror. This woman, the widow and self-confessed murderess of one brother, within an ace of being the wife of the other!

"You murdered him?" I said, turning to the woman.

"I murdered him. He made my life a hell upon earth. He beat me, cursed me, ruined me. He was the foulest-hearted fiend that ever lived. I killed him."

No remorse, no regret in her words. Quite overcome, I leaned against the chimney-piece. Bad as I knew Stephen Morton to have been, I could at that moment only think of him as a gay, light-hearted school-boy, my elder brother, and in those days a perfect hero in my eyes. No wonder my heart was full of vengeance.

Yet even in the first flush of my rage I knew that I could do nothing. No human justice could be meted out to this woman. There was nothing to prove the truth of her self-accusation. She would escape scot-free.

"Would that I could avenge his death!" I said, sullenly.

She sprang to her feet. Her dark eyes blazed. "Avenged!" she cried. "Is it not doubly, trebly avenged? Has he not taken all I care for in life from me? Has he not taken my love from my side? Coward in life, coward in death. When I killed him I knew he would try to come back to me. He has tried for years. Ah, I was too strong

for him. I could banish the face with which he strove to haunt me. I could forget. I could love. I could have been happy. Yet he has conquered at last. Not me—he could not conquer me—but the one I love. Oh, the coward is avenged!”

In spite of my feeling of abhorrence, I gazed on the speaker in amazement. Her words were not those of one who had committed a black crime, but of one who had suffered wrong. The strange, fanciful idea that the dead man had been trying to haunt her, but had been kept at bay by her strong will, was in my experience unprecedented. As I saw the agony of mind under which she was laboring, the thought came to me that perhaps her words were true, that my brother's death was this day avenged. I resolved to leave her. I could gain no good by prolonging the painful scene.

She was still pacing the room in fierce passion. Suddenly she stopped short, and in thrilling accents began to speak. It seemed as if she had forgotten my presence.

“See,” she cried, “the river-bank—the dark rushing stream. Ah, we are all alone, side by side, far away from every one. Fool! if you could read my heart, would you walk so near to the giddy brink? Do you think the memory of the old love will stay my hand when the chance comes? Old love is dead: you beat it, cursed it

to death! How fast does the stream run? Can a strong man swim against it? Oh, if I could be sure—sure that one push would end it all and give me freedom! Once I longed for love—your love. Now I long for death—your death. Oh, brave, swift tide, are you strong enough to free me forever? Hark! I can hear the roar of the rapids in the distance. There is a deep fall from the river cliff; there are rocks. Fool! you stand at the very edge and look down. The moment is come. Ah!”

With her last exclamation she used a violent gesture, as if pushing something fiercely from her. She was, I knew, in her excitement, re-acting the tragedy.

“Free! free! free!” she cried, with a delirious, almost rapturous laugh, and clasped her hands. “Hold him, brave stream! Sweep him away. See! he swims; but he dare not swim with you. You are hurrying down to the rapids. He must face you, and wrestle with you for his life. Bear him down; keep him from me. If he masters you, he will land and kill me. Hold him fast, brave stream! Ha! his strength fails. He is swept away; he is under. No, I see him again. He turns his face to me. He knows I did it. With his last breath he is cursing me. His last breath! He is gone, gone forever! I am free!”

The changes in her voice, ranging from dread to tearful joy, her passionate words, her eloquent

gestures, all these combined to bring the very scene before my eyes. I stood spell-bound, and even, as she described it, seemed to see the unfortunate man battling for dear life in the rushing stream, growing every moment weaker and weaker. As the woman's last wild exclamation—"Gone forever! I am free!"—rang through the room, I seemed to hear the cry of despair drowned as the waves closed over the wretched man's head. I knew every detail of my brother's fate.

I turned to leave the room. I longed to get away, and if possible to banish the events of the day from my mind. It was not given to me to be Stephen Morton's avenger.

My hand was on the door, when the woman sprang to my side. She grasped my arm and drew me back into the room.

"Look!" she whispered. "Do you see it! There! The face—that awful face! It has come at last to me. The dead man has conquered. There! look! His eyes glaring, his mouth mocking. Now it has once come, I shall see it always—always. Look!"

No, I was not doomed again to see or to fancy I saw that face. Its mission, so far as I was concerned, was at an end. But the look of concentrated horror which Judith Despard cast at the wall of the room beggars description. Then with a piteous cry she fell at my feet, and seemed to strive to make me shield her from something she

dreaded. I raised her. She broke from my grasp, and again fell upon the floor, this time in paroxysms of madness.

My tale is ended. That night she was removed to a private lunatic asylum, where for three years she was kept at my expense. She died raving mad, and from inquiries I made I know that from the moment when it first appeared to her to the hour of her death the face of the man she had killed was ever with Judith Despard.

## JULIAN VANNECK.

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[T may be these things were but the result of pure chance. It may be that a man's strange idiosyncrasy and superstition must bear the blame of what had happened. It may be that my tale is one which must either be lightly pooh-poohed, or classed with matters inexplicable.

If I myself have ever formed any decided opinion on the subject I reserve it, and am content to play the simple part of a narrator.

On the 10th of December, 186-, I was at Maidstone. I can fix the exact date, because on that day I defended a man who was tried for murder. The case was one of the last on the calendar—the last in which I had any part. As soon as the verdict was given it was my intention to return to town. The evidence told so fearfully against the prisoner that long before the judge finished his summing up I knew the wretched man was doomed. Indeed, it was a matter of surprise to me that the jury were absent more than five minutes.

But they staid away much longer than I ex-

pected. Perhaps they did not like to send a fellow-creature to the gallows without due time spent in deliberation. The last solemn words spoken by the judge, the fainting convict carried away, I gathered up my papers, and, glancing at the clock, saw it was impossible for me to catch the train by which I had intended to return to town.

I was sorry to have missed it. I had promised to dine that evening with my friend Harley, and, from past experience, knew that a little dinner-party at his rooms should be attended when attendance was possible. Besides, after the painful scene I had just witnessed I felt that I needed the distraction of pleasant society.

I made up my mind to telegraph, beg my friend not to wait for me, but to expect me somewhere about the middle of dinner. I could travel by the next train, and, by dint of making a great rush, might manage to reach the table at the same time, perhaps, as the fish.

Anxious as I was not to disappoint Harley, I was even more anxious not to disappoint myself. There would certainly be good whist after dinner—a great attraction for me. Moreover, I was anxious to meet one of the guests, a man of whom Harley had of late talked a great deal. Indeed, I understood that the dinner had been arranged chiefly with a view of bringing Mr. Julian Vanneck and myself together.

According to Robert Harley's account this Vanneck was a man well worth meeting. He was wonderfully handsome and very wealthy. He could talk half a dozen languages. He could paint, play, and sing. His witty sayings were worthy of Talleyrand. His whist was up to the form of Deschappelles or Cavendish. But then Harley was young and apt to wax enthusiastic about the merits of a new friend. Yet, taking due discount off his praises, enough remained to make me wish to meet Julian Vanneck.

Harley had made his acquaintance at Homburg—an acquaintance which soon became intimacy. My friend was so much taken with Vanneck that he made him promise to visit him whenever he might chance to come to London.

My train reached town punctual to the minute. I dashed off in a cab to my own rooms, jumped into evening clothes, and was at Harley's chambers in Jermyn Street just at the time I had predicted.

"You sit on Mr. Harley's left, sir," said the waiter as I slipped quietly into the room.

At first my advent seemed scarcely noticed. Every one at the table seemed to be in an ecstasy of mirth. Harley, as I took my seat, could hardly master his laughter sufficiently to give me a suitable greeting. I felt quite uncomfortable. There is nothing more annoying than to hear people laughing at some jest which one has missed.



However, the merriment promised well for a pleasant evening.

Still chuckling, Harley turned to me. "I wish you'd come five minutes earlier, Vane."

"I wish I had. What is it?"

"Something Vanneck told us. Oh, so good! Best thing I ever heard. Ah, by the by—Vanneck."

The man on his right looked up.

"Let me introduce you to my friend Vane. What the deuce I shall do between the two of you I can't think. My sides will ache to-morrow."

Rightly or wrongly, I, too, had a certain reputation for wit and conversational powers. Under the present circumstances I felt I was about to be put upon my mettle. No doubt our companions expected something from the meeting between Vanneck and myself.

As Harley named me I bowed, and looked at my opposite neighbor with much curiosity. He met my glance with a pleasant smile, and said a few conventional words expressive of his pleasure at meeting such an intimate friend of Robert Harley's. Even while he spoke a wonderful change came over his face.

A gradual, not a sudden change. The eyes were still fixed on mine, but the smile died away, to be succeeded by a sickly expression, which deepened into what, absurd as it seems, I can only call a look of absolute terror. His very lips grew

pale. The man looked ten years older. Seeing him so, the thought shot through me—it might be that Julian Vanneck was a specious impostor, whom I had somewhere met, and who dreaded lest I should recognize and expose him. Yet, so far as I knew, his features were quite new to me.

I thought our companions must notice his strange agitation. Perhaps he also thought so. With a kind of wrench he turned his eyes from me and lifted his glass to his lips. It was full to the brim, and the trembling of his hand spilled some of the wine.

“Mr. Vane, did you say?” he asked our host.

“Yes; you two will just suit each other.”

He looked at me again. This time he did not display such evident emotion, but his gaze was not such as is usually bent on a new acquaintance. He seemed striving to impress my every feature on his memory, or to call to mind when and where he had previously met me.

“We have never met before, Mr. Vanneck?” I said interrogatively.

“Never, to my knowledge.” He spoke as if it were a matter beyond doubt. His voice was soft, and gave no evidence that I had inspired him with a sudden aversion.

Just then a man on my left, a personal friend, asked me some questions about my luck at the assizes, from which I had just come. He kept

me in conversation for a few minutes, during which time I knew that Julian Vanneck was ever and anon eying me. Harley had been so decided as to the man's being a perfect gentleman that I was surprised to find him falling so far short of what were my ideas of good breeding; the more so as Harley was himself a gentleman, and well able to settle what claim another had to that much-abused designation.

I am unable to say whether Mr. Vanneck's reputation for witty and original remarks was deserved or not. During that dinner I only heard him open his mouth to reply to direct questions, and even then his answers were of the simplest and baldest description. Our host, who had no doubt praised his friend to others besides me, tried to lead him on to talk—to a continuation, perhaps, of that strain which had been so productive of merriment before I entered the room. It was no use. For any brilliant sallies, Vanneck might have been the most ordinary type of man—and, although I am ashamed to say so, I was little better.

A blight seemed to fall upon my spirits and play havoc with my conversation. Yet I believed I had come to that house ripe for enjoyment and conviviality. Perhaps I had made a mistake. The hard work of the day, the close atmosphere of the court, the painful scene I had witnessed—may have affected me more than I thought possi-

ble. That evening, at any rate, I was an utter failure. The good things I should have said did not occur to me until their time was over. A tale I ventured upon fell as flat as ditch water, solely, I knew, on account of the way in which I told it. In spite of the choice dishes, the fine wines, the friendly faces around the table, I began to feel a depression of spirit which I tried in vain to shake off. Moreover, I grew alternately hot and chilled, and feared I must be on the high road to some illness. After one or two attempts to become something like my usual self, I gave up and sat as silent as the man opposite me. So far as purposes of entertainment went, I was not worth my dinner.

Although at the time I would not confess it to myself, there is no doubt but Julian Vanneck was to a great extent answerable for my uneasiness. Whenever I looked in his direction I met his eyes, or saw they had just quitted my face. I could think of no earthly reason why I should so greatly excite a stranger's interest. I was neither famous nor foolish; neither foppish nor slovenly; neither strikingly handsome nor strikingly ugly. I knew nothing of this man—what could he know of me? Yet all dinner-time he was looking at me in this strange, enigmatical way.

We were ten at table. A certain amount of gay talk went on at the other end, but at our end matters were so dull that the feast might

have been a funeral one. My conscience told me that Harley was justified in saying almost pettishly, to his right and left-hand supporters:

"What fellows you two are! I was selfish enough to put you next me for the sake of your talk. Now neither of you will say a word."

I made another effort to do my duty; but it failed and languished. Vanneck made no sign at all. Harley grumbled out another complaint.

"Perhaps they won't show off before each other," said the man on my left.

"I don't know what it is," said Harley; then speaking to his brother, who sat at the bottom of the table, "James, tell the fellows round you to speak up so that I may hear them. Vanneck and Vane are gone dumb."

"And how much they look alike," said James, laughing. "We have all been noticing the resemblance."

We started, and, of course, looked at each other. Curiously enough, now that the thing was suggested, I saw we were not unlike. Although no one would have ventured to put my looks on a par with those of Vanneck, who was a remarkably handsome man, we were not unlike. He was dark. I was fair—sandy, my detractors said—yet there was a resemblance. Moreover, our ages must have been about the same, and there was a great similarity about our build. All Harley's guests agreed that a likeness existed.

"Do you see it?" said Vanneck, turning to our host, and speaking, I thought, nervously.

"Plainly. Give me that likeness on the mantle-piece," added Harley, speaking to one of the servants.

The man brought it to him. It was a photograph which I had given my friend some time ago. It was inclosed in a morocco case. Harley opened it and handed it to Vanneck.

"The difference of complexion doesn't show so much in a photograph," he said.

Vanneck examined it eagerly, then returned it to Harley, who passed it to me. After comparing the representation of myself with the man opposite me, I agreed with the general verdict.

"I wish I had seen that photograph before," said Vanneck, like one thinking aloud.

"Why?" asked Harley, with a shade of surprise in his voice.

Vanneck made no reply, and the matter passed by.

Dinner was over at last. The wines were placed on the table, and the servants left the room. Rare though our host's vintages were, they had no salutary effect upon those in his immediate neighborhood. Vanneck scarcely spoke. I grew more and more depressed. Even Harley caught the infection, which also seemed to be spreading down the table. It is curious what an amount of evil can be wrought by two unsoçiable men,

"I say," exclaimed our host suddenly, "let us have the things cleared away and get to whist. We can keep the wine."

This proposal gave universal satisfaction. The order was issued. We rose from our chairs, and, walking about the room, admired the pictures and *bric-à-brac*. I was looking at a little sea-piece of which Harley was justly proud, when I heard a soft voice say,

"I must apologize if I gave you any offense during dinner, Mr. Vane."

"I am sure you meant none, Mr. Vanneck," I said, disarmed by his evidently sincere manner.

"I meant none. Yet I can not explain. You will accept my apology?"

"If an apology were needed I would; but none is."

He continued to stand at my side, and said something in praise of the picture. Then he asked me if I was of Flemish extraction.

The question would have been absurd save for the fact that there was a tradition in our family that many years ago our ancestors came from the Low Countries. The name Vane, of course, belied it; but the tradition existed all the same.

Julian Vanneck appeared to wait my answer with great eagerness.

I told him all I knew about the matter, and was surprised to see the same ashen look which I had at first noticed steal over his face. What

difference could it make to him if my people came from Flanders or Timbuctoo? Still it was strange he should have asked the question.

"I think it must be a mistake," I continued; "Vane is not a Flemish name."

"Names get mutilated, changed, Anglicized—Van Eck, Vanneck, Vann, Vane."

I laughed.

"You are trying to account for the likeness they talked about?"

He made no reply. I began to wonder whether he held any property which really belonged to another branch of his family, of which he feared I was the representative. But the idea was far-fetched, and would not account for his agitation when first our eyes met.

Just then Harley clapped me on the shoulder.

"Come along, you pair of wet blankets," he said, "the tables are ready."

Julian Vanneck told him he could not stop to play whist. He began to bid the party farewell.

But our friends would listen to no excuse. They simply said he should not go. Harley, although he did not raise such vociferous objections as his merry guests, looked greatly annoyed. Perhaps Vanneck noticed this. Any way, he yielded and consented to stay.

There were, as I have said, ten of us—a nice number for two whist tables. Whist at that time was—I may as well say it now—a passion of mine,



Then I thought I knew something of the game—a common error with youngish men. The “call,” the “echo,” the “penultimate” were not at that time the property of every one; so that, given an intelligent partner with modern views, I believed I could hold my own against the best I might meet in general society. I responded readily enough to Harley’s invitation, and hoped that in the combinations of the noble game I might get rid of my low spirits.

We started to sort ourselves at the tables, Vanneck and I choosing different ones.

“Hullo!” cried Harley, “that won’t do. You two clever ones must play in the same rubber.”

I made no objection, but Vanneck seemed to hesitate.

“Let us draw cards,” he said. “The five highest at one table, the lowest at the other.”

We did so. Vanneck and I each drew a two.

We must have played at least a dozen rubbers. The curious thing was that on every occasion when we were in together Vanneck and I cut as partners. Stranger still, we lost every rubber we played together. Yet there was no question as to the superiority of our play over that of our antagonists. Although the stakes were nothing ruinous, the run of ill-luck cost me quite as much as I could afford to lose. I was not a gambler, and began to think of stopping. Besides, our cards were so wretched that I felt little pleasure

in the game, and, moreover, my fit of blue devils continued unchanged.

"You two are doomed to bring each other bad luck," said one of our antagonists, with all the gayety of a winner.

"Yes," said Vanneck, with queer solemnity, "we will play no more."

I echoed his resolution, and the table was broken up. The other table had suffered from desertions, and it looked as if the party was coming to an end. But Harley still seemed determined to pit Vanneck and myself against each other.

"I should like to have seen you two play on opposite sides," he said.

"To find out which is the bringer of bad luck?" I asked.

Julian Vanneck was sitting in a listless attitude. He seemed to wake up at my words.

"Will you play double-dummy, Mr. Vane—or, better still, piquet?"

I did not like to refuse. "Piquet," I said.

He began sorting out the cards with feverish rapidity.

"Do we play evenly, Harley?" he asked.

"I should think as evenly as two men can play."

"Very well. Let the luck be determined by piquet. What shall we play for, Mr. Vane? Five, ten, twenty, a hundred, or more?"

I told him that ten pounds was quite enough.

"Enough to make you play your best?" he asked, but not offensively.

"Certainly. It is a large stake for me."

"Then to insure your playing your very best I will lay you thirty pounds to twenty."

In spite of these absurd odds I declined to increase my stake. We cut—the deal fell to me. Vanneck's eyes brightened at the first evidence of luck being against me. Then we settled down to work.

The game was slow and tedious. Vanneck played his cards with great care and deliberation, but it vexed me to see the feverish way in which he picked up each fresh hand, and the workings of his face when fortune seemed at all inclined to lean toward me.

I grew sorry I had accepted his challenge, and I was much mystified at the anxiety displayed by a man of such reputed wealth, to win what to him, although not to me, must have been a paltry stake.

Our friends stood or sat around us, watching the play and betting on the players. One of them offered to bet with me.

Before I could answer, Vanneck laid his hand upon my arm.

"Please don't," he said almost beseechingly. "Let me entreat you to have no bet with an outsider. If you wish the stakes increased I will accommodate you."

But I did not want them raised ; the game went on, without pique or capote, so slowly that I thought it would never end ; but the time did at last come when the next deal would settle the matter.

The deal—a disadvantage in itself—was with Vanneck : but then he was some forty points ahead of me, and wanted only five or six to win. He dealt the cards carefully, and as the last two fell from his hands I caught his eyes, and saw them full of wild delight and triumph.

Then, suddenly, a strange unaccountable feeling seized me. For the time it seemed as if every thing in this world and the next depended upon my winning this particular game of cards—and, the score notwithstanding, I felt certain I should win it.

I sorted my cards. Vanneck watched me without touching his own. I made the discard with great care, and upon refilling my hand, saw, with a joy I could not explain, that it would need something approaching a miracle to stop me from running clean out. So I laid my hand down and calmly awaited my antagonist's pleasure.

My face may have announced my impending victory. Vanneck's lips tightened. I saw the perspiration break out on his brow.

Twice he laid his hand on his cards—twice removed it. The men around us looked at him curiously. Harley's face showed blank astonish-

ment. He knew that no trumpery loss would so affect his friend.

Then a queer accident occurred. The youngest of our party—perhaps he had been too severe upon his host's wines—rose to light his cigar, stumbled, fell, caught at the table, and pulled it over, cards and all. Vanneck's hand, my hand, and the spare cards were jumbled together, face up, face down, and altogether higgledy-piggledy.

What was to be done? I knew my hand by heart, but my opponent had not looked at his. By Harley's suggestion, the game was declared drawn. I was glad of it. With the game absolutely in my hands, ready to read off, I could not have agreed to a fresh deal, although I was willing to call it a draw.

With this the card-playing came to an end. A few minutes afterward Vanneck drew near me. "Would you have won?" he whispered.

"Now the matter is arranged, yes. I had an eight sequence and a quatorze of aces."

He turned away and sank into a chair. I felt sure it was not for the money he had set his heart upon beating me.

Then cigars and pipes were lighted and preparations made for departing. As we were all standing together, some of the youngsters, as youngsters will, began doing feats of strength, picking chairs up by one leg, and other useful accomplishments. Some one took up Harley's dumb-bells, for Harley

was an athlete, and kept dumb-bells in both his bed-room and dining-room. Sundry astonishing things were done with them.

"Vane can do better than that," said our host. "Show these boys, Vane."

I took the two masses of metal, crossed the thin parts, and held both in one hand. Perhaps I had grown weaker, or lost the knack of the thing; but as, after raising them slowly at arm's length above my head, I swung them round and round, one of the ponderous irons slipped from my grasp, and, to my unspeakable horror, absolutely brushed Julian Vanneck's temple as it flew past him to fall on the floor with a thud which shook the house. I felt quite sick. A narrower escape from death I had never seen.

I pass over my abject apologies. Strange to say, Vanneck heard them without saying a word to aid me to excuse my own clumsiness. He looked at me like one in a dream. I noticed that he trembled. Certainly he was any thing but a strong-nerved man.

In answer to a question of Harley's, I turned to explain how the accident had happened. While I was speaking Julian Vanneck hastily quitted the room, without a word of adieu to any one. Finding he did not return, we made inquiries, and were informed by the servant that he had left the house.

"I will call upon him in the morning," I said, "and renew my apologies."

I wrote down the name of his hotel; then, bidding my friends good-night, went back to my own quarters.

But not, as a sensible man should have done, to go at once to bed. I sat for more than an hour thinking over the events of the evening—my fit of blue-devils, Vanneck's emotion when I entered the room, the likeness which had been discovered between us, his hint that we belonged to the same family, our evil luck at cards, the unparalleled excitement raised in my mind, and in his, by the last game, the accident which so nearly brought about homicide, his nervous fear and sudden flight—all these gave me plenty of food for thought. No wonder, when at last I sought my bed, I dreamed for the rest of the night of Julian Vanneck; no wonder I awoke in the morning thinking of him.

I resolved to call upon him as soon as possible. As I was breakfasting a letter was brought. I opened it carelessly, and, the writing being strange, glanced at the signature. It was that of the man I proposed visiting. The letter ran so:—

“I do not attempt to explain the meaning of last night's events. Suffice it to say that from the moment I set eyes upon you I knew that we were destined to work each other ill through life. That there is a probability of our having sprung from the same stock strengthens my presentiment.

“You will call this madness or superstition, but

my madness is sane enough, my superstition strong enough, to make me wish to put thousands of miles between us. Even as you read this I am on my way to America. I will write you occasionally as to my whereabouts, and as a favor beg that should any thing lead you in my way you will apprise me, so that I may be able to avoid all chance of our meeting."

"The man is as mad as a hatter!" I exclaimed, as I finished reading this extraordinary letter.

Mad or not, he had really left town. Harley told me so the same day. Some feeling of delicacy or compassion restrained me from showing him Julian Vanneck's letter, but I asked him if his friend's wits were all they should be.

"He's an awfully clever fellow," said Harley.

"Yes; so he may be. But there is something queer about him!"

"Hang it, Vane! If you go and shy twenty-five pounds of iron at a fellow's head he may well look queer."

"I don't mean that. Is he more superstitious than others?"

"As you mention it, he is. Believes in unlucky days, destiny, fortune-telling, ancestral curses, and rot of that sort. I used to chaff him about it. But he's no end of a good fellow, and I hope we shall soon see him back."

I asked no more questions. I pitied a man who could let his superstition put him to so much



inconvenience ; and after a while I ceased to trouble about the matter.

I did not forget it. At least every three months it was brought to my mind by the receipt of a letter from Vanneck. These communications came regularly for several years. They came from New York, Boston, Washington, Chicago, San Francisco, or wherever he had temporarily pitched his tent. They were very short, simply stating the length of time he purposed to stay in each place. There was no reason why I should feel any particular interest in Julian Vanneck, but I did write him once or twice, urging him not to let such an idiosyncrasy as his to interfere with his life ; or begging him, at least, to give me some logical reason for his fears. Then, as he did not reply to my letters, I left the matter alone. It was too ridiculous to talk or trouble about !

Some five years after our meeting a great change for the better took place in my life. I took unto myself a wife. I was now making a good income at the bar, so could well afford such a luxury. As this is not a love tale, I need not dilate upon the perfections of the girl whose love I was fortunate enough to win. She was an Anglo-American— that is, her father and mother were English people who had emigrated many years ago, and had just returned, with ample means, to their native land. My wooing went on smoothly enough ; but when our engagement was a reality, and the full-

est confidences were exchanged between Helen and myself, she told me she had an unpleasant task to perform. Before she had left America she had promised to inform a gentleman whenever she found herself in her present happy position. He had pleaded hard for this favor, and as there was little else in which she could gratify him—poor man!—she had at last promised to grant it.

Naturally I grew inquisitive, perhaps rather jealous. Helen confessed readily that the man in question had wooed her unsuccessfully. He was young, rich, and handsome, yet had been unable to win her love. He was in some things a very strange character. He told her, when he found his pleadings were vain that he could have made her love him had it not been for the existence of a man who he feared was destined to win her—a man she had not yet seen. He begged her as soon as she was betrothed to humor his whim, and let him be one of the first to hear the news.

“Why didn’t he tell you the name of your future husband?” I asked.

“I did not ask him. How could I?”

“Well, what is your unfortunate friend’s name? I can pity him now, of course.”

“Julian Vanneck.”

I could not help my start of surprise. The coincidence was most extraordinary. Helen noticed my movement. “Do you know him?” she asked,

I told her I had met him, but I did not say any thing about the results of that meeting. I asked her many questions about him, and learned that the estimate put on him by those who knew him was much the same as Harley's. He was considered one of the most gifted, accomplished men that could be seen any where, and was undoubtedly very rich.

"How was it you could not love such a perfect creature?" I asked.

"How can I tell? I might perhaps have done so at last had you not come. Just before we met I was beginning to compare him with the men one sees about."

"I hope I am the man he predicted would marry you."

"Of course you are," said Helen, delightfully confident that nothing could prevent our union.

Her confidence was justified. We were married shortly afterward. On the eve of my wedding day I received a letter from Vanneck.

"Was I not right?" it ran. "The only woman I have ever loved you win. There may yet be worse to come. God grant we may never meet!"

Shall I be thought to have been infected by his peculiar superstition if I felt almost inclined to echo his prayer?

Nothing particular occurred during the next two years. Julian Vanneck wrote every three months. He seemed to have finally settled down

in one of the largest American towns. My qualm of superstition had long since passed away. I could only look at the affair from the ridiculous side. It was no business of mine, but the idea of a man keeping away from England, perhaps even from Europe, because he dreaded to meet such a harmless being as myself, was, to say the least, comical.

After having for so many years seen his letters with American stamps in the corner, it was quite a surprise to receive one with our Queen's head upon it, and post-marked Liverpool. It told me the writer had been suddenly called to England. Nothing, it said, but a matter of life and death would have brought him here. He knew he had no claim on my indulgence, but if for the next fortnight I would go on the Continent, his gratitude would be unbounded. He knew also that my going without due preparation must subject me to great pecuniary loss. Would I accept the inclosed as compensation? If he had valued my time too low he would, upon hearing from me to that effect, fully satisfy me.

The "inclosed" was a check for five hundred pounds! No wonder I repeated my former ejaculation, "Mad as a hatter."

Of course, I could not accept his money, although, had circumstances permitted, I might have complied with his request; but at that moment compliance was a sheer impossibility. I

was retained in a case so important, that the deputing of my part to another might have damaged me immensely. So I returned Julian Vanneck's check, and, while regretting my inability to oblige him, once more ventured to remonstrate with him as to the absurdity of his behavior. He did not reply to my letter.

I heard from my old friend Harley that he was in London. Harley had met him by pure chance, and from his manner fancied that matters had gone awry with him.

"He isn't a bit the same splendid fellow," he said; "he's as moody as an undertaker—won't go out any where—seems afraid to meet any one."

"Remember," I said. "I never saw him any thing but moody."

"No. You only met him that night you tried to kill him. Perhaps he's afraid you're waiting to chuck another dumb-bell at his head."

A few days after this conversation I had occasion to run down to Oxford. I was alone in a first-class carriage, and was searching my bag for some papers which I meant to peruse on the journey. The train had just started when, defiant of by-laws, a late passenger opened the carriage door and jumped in. He closed the door behind him, then turned toward me. It was Julian Vanneck!

Would he know me? Yes, at the first glance he recognized me. A look of sheer terror sprang

into his eyes. Without a word he staggered back against the carriage door. He could not have secured it properly. To my horror it flew open, and the man disappeared. The train was not going at full speed, but too fast for any one to fall from it with impunity. I grew quite cold as I rushed to the window and looked out. We had just cleared Paddington. I saw Vanneck lying helpless on the network of rails. I saw two or three men run toward him, lift him, and bear him away, for all I knew, dead!

From the first station at which we stopped, I telegraphed. Although in no way to blame, I felt very miserable until I received an answer. I was then much relieved at hearing that the damage sustained amounted to no more than a broken leg. So much, I was half inclined to think, the man deserved for his folly.

Upon my return to town I made inquiries respecting him. He had been carried to the Great Western Hotel, and was progressing favorably. Save for the fractured limb he was uninjured.

Although, after this, I did not venture to make any more inquiries in person, I heard of him from time to time through Harley, who, like a good fellow, often went to keep him company. At last I learned he was quite cured. Then I received a letter saying he was about to return to America. On his arrival he would write and let me know where he had taken up his abode. After a while

his letters came with their usual monotonous regularity.

In the course of the next year my wife's father died. At his death he still held considerable property in America, in the realization of which troublesome complications threatened to arise. It was thought necessary for some one to go to the United States to look after the interests of the widow and daughter. I was undoubtedly the most fitting person to do so. The long vacation was at hand ; so I resolved to spend my holiday in America. Then I thought of Julian Vanneck.

It was, to say the least, curious that circumstances should at last compel me to visit the continent in which he had taken refuge from what could only be the *mal occhio* he believed I exercised over him. I did not trouble much about the superstitious side of the matter. During the short time I purposed being in the States it was a most unlikely chance that we should meet. Nevertheless, after the scores of letters he had written me, it was an act of courtesy incumbent upon me to let him know that I was about to cross the Atlantic. I wrote to him—gave him, in fact, an outline of my intended travels, so that if he wished to do so he might fly to Baffin's Bay or Cape Horn in order to gratify his whim in keeping out of my way.

Yet, for myself, I should have been glad to have encountered the man, if only to once more strive

to convince him of his folly. I must confess that after the things which had occurred I felt a certain amount of interest in Julian Vanneck. Any one must feel interested in a man who would willingly fly to the ends of the earth to avoid him!

So, a few days before I sailed, I wrote my letter. I purposely left it as late as possible because I was not certain but what American matters might, after all, arrange themselves without the necessity of my intervention. I gave this letter, with the rest of my general correspondence, to my clerk, to copy and dispatch. I may here say that by some fatality he directed it to an English town bearing the same name as Julian Vanneck's last place of abode. For a week or two it kicked about in the post office, eventually coming back through the dead letter office. By the time it returned to my chambers I was in New York.

My wife did not accompany me. She hated the sea, and was not very fond of America. Still she would have come had I wished it, but my journey was to be such a busy, hurried affair that I thought she was much better at home taking care of the children.

My late father-in-law had been a shrewd but a speculative man. A great portion of his wealth had been acquired by buying land near to what he judged would be rapidly-growing towns. In many instances his judgment had been at fault, but whenever it was right the immense rise in price



more than compensated for many other failures. His properties—valuable and worthless—were much scattered about, and it was part of my plan to visit each one, and, after taking the best local advice, to decide whether it should be kept, or sold for what it would fetch in open market. So it was my travels took me to several towns seldom visited by the ordinary tourist.

Japhetstown was one of these. Here my father-in-law had made a very bad investment. Some score of years ago Japhetstown had sprung into life, and in a precocious infancy had boasted of some day doing great things. But it grew to a certain size, then grew no more ; began, rather, to dwindle. The particular branch of industry which had called it into life did not ramify and increase, as it should have done. Japhetstown had been given its chance, and had failed. I quickly decided that the land about here should be turned into cash as soon as possible.

The person to whom I had been recommended to apply for information respecting this locality was a farmer. I spent the best part of one day with him, going over the ground and getting a general idea of the place. He was a clever, hard-headed, and, I believe, honest old fellow. He was hospitable, and insisted that I should partake of his good cheer before we parted. His farm was close by—not more than three miles from the town. I accepted his hearty invitation, and early evening found me in his house.

Strange! The moment I crossed the threshold I was attacked by low spirits. Yet I had nothing whatever to trouble or annoy me. I was in splendid health. True, I was almost famishing, but my hunger was a healthy hunger. This sudden invasion of blue fiends called to my mind my state when first I met Julian Vanneck.

The farmer opened the door of a sitting-room. He asked me to step in; he would join me in a minute. Through the open door I saw reflected in a mirror which hung on one wall the figure of a man who was apparently deeply engaged in the perusal of a book. I started back. In spite of the precautions I had taken, Julian Vanneck and I were under the same roof.

My first impulse was to leave the place unseen; but reflection told me that such a course would be simply childish. Now that chance had brought us together, let me seize the opportunity of setting the man's mind at ease. And another thought struck me. There was no reason why he should recognize me. I now differed much in appearance from the man he had seen on two previous occasions. I was roughly clad, and tanned by the sun and wind. Last year, having suffered from a weakness of the throat, my doctor had advised me to grow a beard. I had done so, although, greatly to my disgust, it had appeared streaked with gray, and so made me look old enough to grace the bench, if fortune would but

place me there. What an admirable ending to all Vanneck's absurd fears if he spent a few hours in my company without recognizing me! I closed the door, and turned to my host.

"A gentleman is in there," I said.

"He's boarding a bit with me. Writin' a book on American scen'ry, and doing his own pictures. After all, 'twould take a lot to beat the scen'ry round Japhetstown."

This was true; the country about here was unusually picturesque.

"Kindly call me by some other name," I said. "Mr. Jones will do. I don't want the object of my errand here known to every one."

The farmer gave me a knowing smile. Opening the door once more, he accompanied me into the room, and told the man inside I was Mr. Jones, from England. Vanneck laid down his book, and bowed with great politeness.

I was delighted to find he showed no signs of recognition. He looked very well, and remarkably handsome. There was something of the artist in his general appearance. I disguised my voice as well as I could, and we carried on an easy conversation. All seemed to promise well for the success of my plot.

An ample meal was soon spread upon the table. I did full justice to it. Vanneck, although he ate nothing, still kept up the talk. He asked me questions about England. He spoke of painting,

music, politics, literature. He was, certainly, a well-read man, and I quite looked forward to the morrow, when I meant him to know that he had unwittingly met and conversed with me. My low spirits in a great measure vanished. I dare say the success of my stratagem dispelled them.

When dinner, supper, or whatever the meal may be called, was over, Vanneck, with a courteous bow to me, left the room.

For some time longer I sat talking to the farmer on matters of business; then I begged that my horse might be saddled. It was night, but the moon made every thing as light as day; so I firmly declined the offer of an escort to the town. I felt sure I could find my own way. I lingered a little while in the hope that Julian Vanneck would again show himself. He did not do so, and, at last, bidding my host a hearty adieu, I struck off in the direction of Japhetstown.

Then happened to me what often happens to persons who are convinced of their own powers of remembering a road once trodden. I did not exactly lose my way, but for awhile I stood uncertain at a fork in the track, wondering whether I should go to the right or to the left. I settled the matter by tossing up a dollar. After all, it mattered but little. I could not be very far from the town, and if I did go a mile or two out of my way, need only retrace my steps and take the other path. So on I went, as the coin told me to go.

But, before I had ridden very far, I knew I was astray. I was just thinking of trying back when, on a small plot of land to my right, I saw by the strong light of the moon a man on horseback—horse and rider standing motionless as a bronze equestrian group.

I had no reason for thinking Japhetstown any thing but a peaceable, God-fearing place, but I must own the sight somewhat startled me. It looked unpleasantly like a highwayman waiting my arrival. However, a man must be considered innocent until he is proved guilty, and the worst mistake I could make was to show fear. Moreover, I wanted to make certain that I had strayed from my right road.

So I trotted on, and reined up close to the motionless figure. I confess it gave me a shock to find that the horseman was Julian Vanneck.

His brows were knitted. His face, as I saw in the white moonshine, was pale and stern. There was a strange air of solemnity about him. He looked at me, and that look gave me such a sensation that I wished I could summon up enough cowardice to turn and ride away. As it was I accosted him cordially:

“You here, Mr. Vanneck! You can tell me if I am on the right road.”

“You have broken your promise,” he said, in bitter accents, and which at once dispelled my belief that I had escaped recognition.

I thought it better to accept the situation without any further attempt at deception.

"What promise?" I asked.

"To let me know if ever you visited this country. Heaven knows I have done my share in keeping away from you!"

"Did I promise? I think not. Any way, I wrote you, naming every place I intended visiting. I could do no more."

He seemed to shudder. "Fate!" I heard him whisper. "Fate!" Then he turned to me fiercely—

"Why did you enter that house while I was there?"

"It was pure accident. I did not wish to annoy you. May I not in my turn ask why you wait for me here?"

"I came here thinking to avoid all chance of meeting. I did not know whither you were going—east, west, north, or south, but nothing I thought could bring you this way, and yet you come."

"I did not think you recognized me," I said.

"Recognized you! I felt your presence before I saw you."

"Look here, Mr. Vanneck," I said, with business-like sharpness, "now that we have met can you not talk like a rational being—at least give me your reasons for your strange avoidance of me, and explain why——"

“ Explain ! ” he burst forth passionately. “ How can I explain in a way which would be intelligible to an unimaginative, skeptical man like yourself. If I told you that from the moment my eyes fell upon you I knew that we were destined to work each other evil through life—if I told you this you would call it arrant superstition.”

“ I should,” I said bluntly.

“ But,” I continued, “ on a former occasion you seemed to hint that we are of the same extraction and name.”

“ Yes ; and if I said that this fact strengthens my presentiment—if I were to go back and tell you of generations ago—tell you of a deed so dark that it is yet unexpiated—that even now the descendants of the actors concerned influence each other’s fates, would you believe me ? ”

“ Most certainly not.”

“ Will you, then, on your side, explain how each time we have met my life has been all but sacrificed ? Will you explain how, unknowingly, you won from me the woman I loved ? Will you explain why you took this road to-night ? ”

He looked ghastly as he asked this question.

“ The toss of a coin made me come this way,” I said, with an assumption of easiness, thinking the more prosaic my answers the more likely they were to bring him to his senses.

“ That you would call chance,” he said, in a low voice. “ Chance—or fate ? ”

I saw the futility of arguing with him. His disease was incurable.

"Well, Mr. Vanneck," I said, "I am sorry for your own sake you hold such strange ideas. I regret that I intruded upon you. Now, I think, we had better separate."

"Yes," he said, "it is time that we separated."

I was just about to wheel my horse round. Something indefinable in Vanneck's accent made me glance at him. I was just in time. Even as the last word left his lips I saw something gleam in the moonshine, and knew that my strange companion was covering me with a revolver. Without any clear idea of what was best to do, I drove my spurs into my horse's sides and pulled wildly at the rein. The brute reared on high. Vanneck fired at that moment, and I felt sure that his bullet passed close to my horse's neck. In another second I had thrown myself from my saddle.

The madman was preparing for another shot. In wild desperation I rushed straight at him. My sudden charge may have disconcerted him. I saw the flash—heard the report; yet I lived, and my arms were round his waist. I put every pound of my strength into that clutch. I tore him from the saddle and threw him heavily on the ground; then—perhaps the best thing I could have done—I fell on top of him.

We were both strong men in the prime of life, but my hand was on his throat, my knee on his



pistol arm, so he was comparatively at my mercy. Yet I had no wish to kill the man outright. Even with my own life at stake, I did not consider him accountable for his actions. Trivial things intrude themselves on moments the most supreme, and my old phrase, "Mad as a hatter," came to my lips; so I set to work to choke Vanneck into subjection or insensibility.

He made fierce efforts to free his right hand, but my knee was just on the elbow joint, and crushing it into the earth. I felt certain I could, if needful, hold him for an hour like this. No doubt the sense of strangulation which I was effectually bringing about made the fingers of his right hand convulsively pull the trigger of the pistol and discharge another chamber.

The shot harmed me as little as the preceding ones; but I heard a wild whinny of pain. Suddenly a dark body seemed to hover for half a second over us. Something struck me on the shoulder and hurled me to a considerable distance; but even as I was torn from my antagonist I heard a horrible, sickening sound—a crunch—a crash of bone. I heard one deep groan, and then—silence.

I staggered to my feet. My arm hung helpless at my side; the breath was completely beaten out of my body. A renewal of the struggle would on my part have been a sheer impossibility.

\* \* \* \* \*

There was no need to renew it. Julian Vanneck lay on the ground still and dead, his skull shattered to pieces by the hoof of the wounded brute which had leaped so wildly over our struggling forms!

Was it chance? Was it fulfillment?

# THE "BICHWA."

(A CLERGYMAN'S TALE).

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## CHAPTER I.

**A**LTHOUGH this tale is little more than the barest statement of facts, believe me I hesitated long before I could make up my mind to give it to the public. Writers of pure fiction are often blamed if a distinct and beneficial purpose does not underlie their imaginative efforts, so that to one of my own calling the consciousness that he has written any thing which can do the reader no good, and which by no ingenuity can be twisted to a moral aim, should be, at least, a subject of self-reproach. Indeed, I feel that the only excuse I can make to myself for yielding to the temptation of playing a narrator's part, is that human nature compels a man to wish to retail to his fellows any strange and out-of-the-common events which he may have witnessed.

Nevertheless, I doubt if this excuse would have removed my scruples had I not felt sure that nine

readers out of every ten would, by the theory of coincidence, excited sentiment, overwrought imagination, innate superstition, or what not, be able to explain and account for occurrences which, I am almost ashamed to own, have ever been to me more than mysterious.

If the exigencies of my story permitted, I would willingly conceal my identity. Not from the dread of ridicule; not that I am ashamed to confess that I am a clerk in holy orders; but from the fear that I may be supposed to expect more credence for a clergyman's word than for that of another man. However, I who tell this tale am William Denys, now and for many years rector of Bartfield, in the county of Dorsetshire.

In the year 1860 I was a young curate with somewhat unsettled views. My High Church friends called me Evangelical; my Evangelical friends called me Ritualistic. Which I eventually became is a matter only concerning myself, my parishioners, and my bishop.

But besides my views, my future in 1860 was also unsettled. I had been for some months out of employment. Perhaps, if the truth be told, I was, having a small income of my own, rather fastidious as to what curacy I accepted; and, moreover, a few months' holiday was by no means a time of weariness to me. I had many friends, and utilized my leisure by paying a series of pleasant and long-promised visits.

Among those with whom I sojourned was an old school and 'Varsity friend and rival, who was at that time holding a desirable scholastic appointment at Liverpool. One night, when dining out at a men's party, I found myself seated by a man whose name I learned was Hood.

He must have been about fifty years of age; he was very tall, and I particularly noticed the immense breadth of his shoulders; his hands were large and sunburned; his face, that of one who had endured much exposure and roughing. In fact, such was his general appearance, that I was not surprised to learn that Mr. Hood was a great traveler, whose foot had trod almost every portion of the earth's surface.

He was a most pleasant dinner neighbor, full of anecdote, yet not more egotistical than was agreeable. By the end of the prolonged and rather too convivial meal we had become excellent friends; so much so, that he invited me to dine with him the next day, and learning that I was staying with a friend, extended the invitation to my host.

At the last moment some engagement, I forget what, prevented Lewis, my friend, from accompanying me; so at seven o'clock I found myself dining alone with my new and interesting acquaintance.

Mr. Hood lived some little way out of Liverpool. His house, though not large, was yet larger

than he needed, as he was a bachelor, and lived alone. Our dinner was simple, but well cooked and tastily served. The wines, although I followed my host's temperate example and drank little, were beyond suspicion. By the time that cigars and coffee made their appearance, I congratulated myself heartily that I had accepted Mr. Hood's impromptu invitation.

During dinner and afterward our conversation went on without flagging. Gradually it drifted away from the subject of travel and adventure, and we found ourselves discussing moral problems, particularly the amount of guilt attaching to hasty and violent acts of passion. We took views so far opposed as to make the argument interesting, and I have no doubt I displayed the fault common to many young priests, of assuming that the ceremony of ordination and the adoption of clerical garments in some mysterious way make a man of twenty-five an authority on ethics. Once or twice I detected an amused expression on Mr. Hood's face; so perhaps it was as well that the conversation was at last taken from debatable ground by my expressing a wish to examine some of the trophies of travel which were scattered about the room.

"I have never been a great collector of general curiosities," said Mr. Hood. "I have given my time and money to one subject; would you like to see the result of my hobby-riding?"

Naturally, such was my desire ; so after instructing a servant to light the lamps, my host led me to what he called his museum.

"I must apologize," he said, with a smile, "for showing a man of peace such a sight."

The room was a large one, apparently built on to the house. The walls were lined with tall glazed cases, and a long show-case ran down the center. The lamps were arranged so as to throw their light into the various cases.

That collection was an interesting if a painful sight. There was not an article in it which was not devised either for offensive or defensive purposes—to take the life of a man or to prevent its being taken. There were complete suits of exquisitely wrought Persian armor, each surmounted by the inlaid round-topped helmet, from which hung the finely-wrought curtain—I forget the technical name—of tiny interwoven links. There were the swords of every eastern nation—cimeters, yataghans, headman's swords, and a dozen other sorts. There were spears and halberds; richly-gilded state axes and maces; murderous-looking cutch axes and spiked clubs. There were Burmese dhas and treacherous curved Malay creeses. There were hundreds of other strange weapons, the names and nationalities of which have passed from my mind. But the great feature of the collection was what I may, using a generic term, call daggers. I was quite ready to believe Mr. Hood when he assured me that his assortment was unique,

Thrusting daggers, stabbing daggers, cutting daggers, daggers with which to strike up, down, or even one might say round a corner. Long-bladed and short-bladed, broad-bladed and narrow-bladed—even double, if not treble-bladed. Straight, curved, even undulating from hilt to needle-like point. Daggers so richly inlaid with gold that a king or chief might have worn them—daggers plain and serviceable, evidently meant for bloodshed, not show. Handles of jade, ivory, and wood; plain, carved, or richly jeweled. Sheaths of velvet mounted with precious metal and stones, or simple sheaths meet for a simple blade. Jamdhars, kanjhars, peshkubs—a man must be an authority on such subjects to describe them rightly.

Every dagger was kept beautifully clean, and when a bright steel, polished to its utmost brilliancy. Where the weapon possessed a sheath, the sheath was placed beside it. Under each specimen was written the name, date, and description.

Even at the risk of being thought a prig, I say again that, in spite of the interest of the collection, the thought that so much time, trouble, and ingenuity had been spent in manufacturing articles whose sole end was bloodshed and cruelty, was to me a painful one.

Mr. Hood, who was very proud of his collection, opened several of the cases, and drew my attention to the peculiarities and beauties of the different



weapons. "Hold this in your hand," he said, giving me a long, bright dagger. "Don't you feel that you would like to stick it into some one."

"I am thankful to say I do not."

"Any way, I can quite imagine that the first thought of a savage who had acquired such a treasure as this must be to use it. I quite sympathize with the old warriors in their affection for their pet swords. There may have been some hidden virtue in those old dwarf-forged brands of the vikings which drove the owners baresark."

"You are jesting, of course."

"No, I am not. The old metal workers had secrets of their own. They may have known how to make blades the very sight of which threw a man into a fighting rage. Hence the peace-strings which in quiet times bound the blade to the scabbard."

Collectors are generally enthusiastic and full of theories respecting their acquisitions, so I contented myself by expressing a simple difference of opinion. Mr. Hood looked at me thoughtfully.

"I should like to try a little experiment," he said: "I wonder if I am much stronger than you."

"You can try if you like," I said, laughing. I was rather proud of my strength. He came to my left side, passed his right arm under my armpit, and grasped my right forearm. He then placed his left hand on my left arm. "Can you move?" he said, suddenly tightening his grip.

I have already mentioned his height and breadth of shoulder. I was not surprised to find him the stronger man, but I was both surprised and nettled to find that I was helpless as an infant in his iron grasp. Struggle as I would, I could not free myself. He soon released me, and I looked at him with that feeling of respect which a muscular Christian feels toward a more muscular Christian.

Mr. Hood then opened one of his wall cases, and from a corner took a small and curiously-worked metal casket. He opened this casket by touching a hidden spring, and drew out a small sheathed dagger. Round the sheath was wrapped a piece of paper, on which was written what I supposed to be a description of the weapon. He unrolled this, handed me the dagger, and told me to look well at it, as it was very old and curious.

Had it been on view with its fellows I should have passed it without notice. The handle was of plain dull green jade, the only peculiarity being that it was cut into octagonal shape, and that on the facets were inscribed eastern characters. The blade I could not see, as it was hidden by a plain sheath, which to my inexperienced eyes seemed to be of modern if not European make. I tried to unsheath it, but found that a small chain, passing round the handle and then secured to the sheath prevented my doing so. I turned inquiringly to Mr. Hood.

"It is a '*Bichwa*' or 'scorpion sting,'" he said.

"I showed you one or two others of the same shape. This one is nearly a thousand years old."

I looked at the little weapon with more reverence, and turning it in my hand asked the meaning of the inscription on the handle. Seven of the facets were inscribed, the eighth was blank.

"They are men's names," said my host, "men of eminence. I have taken immense pains to identify them. This one, the first inscribed, carries us back to the time of the house of Ghizni, which first established the Mahommedan rule in India. This one, the last, is comparatively of to-day. It is the name of a high placed English official, whose cruelty and extortions made his name hateful through the province he ruled."

"There is a wide space between the two."

"Yes; but the Brahmins lived before Mahmud, and they live now. This dagger was one of their sacred treasures. No matter how it came into my possession. There it is, and now you shall examine it more fully."

He took a small chisel and pried open one of the links of the chain which went round the handle of the historical weapon. He handed it to me, and to my surprise placed himself in the same position as when we tested our respective strength; the only difference being that his fingers rested softly on my arms instead of grasping them.

"Now unsheath it and look at the blade," he said.

With some curiosity I obeyed. The blade was about five inches long, with a wave in it which gave it the appearance of a tapering flame. It was of dull gray steel, and curious reddish brown lines seemed to run longitudinally from the heel to the point, where they blended, so giving the point a sustained red hue. It was a significant, diabolical little weapon.

Yet it had a fascination for me. I did not lay it down, but turned it from side to side, looking at those red lines, endeavoring to trace them one by one until they merged into the cloud at the point. Whether they were in the steel or simply on the surface I could not say, but presently I thought they began to grow brighter and more vivid. "What a curious fancy!" I murmured, and looked closer and closer at the dagger.

Presently a thrill—a glow—I scarcely know what to call it, ran, as it were, from the fingers which closed on the handle, up my arm and through my whole body. For a moment the sensation was not a pleasing one; and then—

(I am ashamed to go on. My pen has been lying idle for an hour or more as I try to make up my mind whether to tear these sheets to pieces or to finish them. Once more I am weak enough to decide on the latter course.)

In plain words, then, a sudden horrible feeling

took possession of me. It was more than an impulse—it was an overpowering necessity. My fingers grasped the handle of the dagger convulsively, and I felt that something absolutely compelled me to bury that flame-shaped blade in my heart. I felt no wish to destroy myself, but on the other hand I felt no fear of death or horror at the crime of self-destruction. It simply seemed an unavoidable act. I was not a free agent. The dagger seemed turning slowly toward my breast, and something told me that when it pointed there fully I should be bound to strike. At that critical moment I felt Hood's iron grip upon my arms.

From the instant I first became engrossed in the examination of the *Bichwa* till now I had entirely forgotten that I was not alone. In fact, I believe I had forgotten where I was. But Hood's grasp, which brought back the knowledge that he was with me, did not banish the jugglery, or whatever it was. It simply changed the working of the spell. The feeling that the dagger must be used was as paramount as before, but now it must be used on another. I made a frantic effort to free my hands. I felt my companion's bony fingers slide down my arm and grasp my wrist with such immense force that my fingers were compelled to unclose, and let the dagger fall from them. As it left my hand the homicidal mania—I can call it by no other name—passed

from me, and I sank on the nearest chair in a state of bewilderment and abasement.

I noticed Mr. Hood, with his eyes turned away from the accursed weapon, lift it and replace it in its sheath. Then he came to my side.

"What jugglery, what horrible conjuring trick is this?" I gasped out.

"Tell me what you felt?" he said. I was silent.

"Did you feel," he continued, "an irresistible desire to take your own life with that dagger?"

"Yes," I replied sullenly. I was ashamed to add that I also felt the desire to commit murder.

"Then you will not dispute the fact that the old metal workers threw some occult influence into their art. Listen. So far as I have been able to identify them, each man whose name is engraved on the handle of that old dagger slew himself."

I shuddered. "For Heaven's sake, destroy the diabolical thing," I said.

"It is too curious, too historical to destroy."

"But if it should pass into other hands," I urged.

"I have taken all precautions. A full description of its virtues is attached to it. Now let us go back to the dining-room."

I followed him in silence. The thought that five minutes ago I, a clergyman, was longing with a fierce longing to kill myself or another was ter-

rible to me. I felt I had been the victim to some trick, but in what the trickery lay I could not determine. Any way, I no longer experienced any pleasure in my host's society; so, as soon as I could, bade him a cold adieu.

I never saw him again. Some time afterward I made inquiries about him, and learned that he had left his house near Liverpool and had gone no one knew where.

## CHAPTER II.

I MUST now pass over twenty years, and begin what may be called my story. Although the curious episode connected with Mr. Hood and his collection of arms made at the time a great, even painful, impression upon me, this at last wore off, and as years passed, if I thought at all about the matter, I was quite able to satisfy myself that some strange mental freak would amply account for the sanguinary feelings which had taken possession of me. Nevertheless, the incident was not one to be entirely forgotten, and I am sure that, although so many years have elapsed, my description of what occurred is strictly accurate.

In 1880 my health began to give way. Not only had I for many years borne the strain of administering to the wants of a large and poor parish, but a terrible bereavement had rendered me all

but incapable of fulfilling my duties. I was no longer a young man, full of hope, work, and energy, but a heartbroken and childless widower. So prostrated I felt, that I am ashamed to say I contemplated resigning my living. My kind friends and parishioners would not hear of this. With a generosity and delicacy too seldom exercised, they subscribed enough money to pay a clergyman to take my place for a twelvemonth; then bade me try what rest and change of scene would do toward restoring me to health and peace of mind.

I went abroad for a while; then I returned and wandered about England. At times I spent a few days with old friends, at times I went where chance or inclination led me, staying at one place or another until I grew tired and willing to turn elsewhere.

My wanderings at last led me to the delightful gray old town of Winchester. One morning, thinking I should like to explore the neighborhood, I hired a horse and started off. I rode several miles out of the town, and while I was jogging along, deep in saddened thought, my horse shied and threw me. A thousand stars flashed before my eyes, and then all was darkness.

When consciousness returned, I seemed to be in a dream. I knew I was lying on some kind of an improvised ambulance, and that men were carrying me.



"Bring him to my house—it is the nearest," I heard some one say. Then I became once more unconscious.

I awoke, and found myself in a bedroom, and surrounded by every comfort, including a surgeon, who was sponging my head and making preparations for sewing up the nasty cut which had been the result of my own negligence or my horse's vice. The operation having been skillfully performed, I soon felt well enough to inquire for and thank the good Samaritan who had picked me up, a wounded stranger, on the roadside.

Fortunately, the damage I have described was all I sustained. After a couple of days' rest I was well enough to leave my room. I should, of course, at once have relieved my charitable host of my presence, but he so courteously insisted upon my remaining that I could not refuse.

He was a man of about five-and-thirty, tall, thin, and of quiet, gentlemanly demeanor. He paid me every attention, and during the time while I was confined to my room frequently sat with me and talked on various topics. The consequence was that when I was able to rise from my bed and proclaim my convalescence, we were all but friends, and he begged me to remain as his guest for so long as I found it convenient.

His name was Fraser — Maurice Fraser. I gathered that he was a man of some property. He was married, but his wife was away at present

on a visit. He expected her back in the course of a few days, and said he looked forward to the pleasure of making his new friend, myself, known to her.

The house was a small, unostentatious country house, with a fine garden and shrubbery. It was situated in one of the most charming parts of Hampshire, and its owner and occupier should have been a happy, contented man.

The more I saw of my host the more I liked him. He was well read and intelligent. His tastes were studious and literary. He was for the time alone in his house—like myself, he had no children — so when I found his kind invitation was really meant, I took him at his word and staid on.

Early in the next week Mrs. Fraser returned. I had grown rather curious to see her—the more so as I had a kind of fancy that Mr. and Mrs. Fraser were not a very attached couple. To my rather old-fashioned notions it seemed strange that a wife should leave her husband alone while she paid protracted visits. But people tell me that such separations between husband and wife are nowadays by no means uncommon. If so, so much the worse for domestic happiness.

Mrs. Fraser came back, and so far as I could see, the greeting between the two was affectionate, if undemonstrative. I was presented, and found the husband's welcome to me indorsed

by his wife with enough cordiality to make me feel I was not an intruder.

I am no judge of beautiful women, but I believe I am not wrong in saying that Mrs. Fraser was one of the fairest creatures that ever trod the earth. I have not the writer's knack of describing face and figure. Let it suffice that she was young, and very, very beautiful.

She arrived home just in time for dinner. Fraser and I drove to the railway station to meet her. She talked to me pleasantly during the drive to the house. Then she vanished until she appeared, perfectly but simply dressed, at the dinner table.

During the progress of the meal she turned to her husband. "I met Ralph Brandon at the Bailey's," she said. "He promised to come to us for a few days."

Fraser made no comment on this piece of news. He merely asked when Brandon was coming. But I fancied there was a change in his voice as he spoke.

"To-morrow or the day after, he said," answered Mrs. Fraser, carelessly; and then the conversation became general.

The days passed pleasantly enough at the house in Hampshire. The weather was glorious, and I found plenty of time for that calm meditation which had by now become almost a necessity to me. I have mentioned that Fraser was a reading man.

Nevertheless he did not use his library much. I soon found it was his custom to take the book upon which he was engaged to a seat in a secluded part of the shrubbery, which, however, commanded a fine view. Here, weather permitting, he sat for hours. As soon as I discovered this habit of his, in spite of polite protests, I left him to himself, and amused myself as best I could. I dare say I was as fond of solitude as my host, so the arrangement worked very well.

Of Mrs. Fraser I saw little, except at meal times and in the evening. Somehow she seemed too young a companion for me—too young I sometimes thought for her quiet and studious husband.

The expected guest, Mr. Brandon, arrived in due course. A tall, well-dressed, and I suppose I must say, handsome man. Curiously enough, before he had been in the house five minutes I received the impression that my presence there was by no means welcome to him. I had no reason for this fancy, but I could not divest myself of it.

Although Maurice Fraser and his new guest appeared to be on terms of easy intimacy, it was not a hard matter to see that Brandon was Mrs. Fraser's friend far more than he was her husband's. I can not stop now to write of trivial details, or tell how my suspicions that Brandon was wronging Fraser as cruelly as ever one man

wronged another were first aroused. Suffice it to say, that before three days had gone by, I had damning evidence that friendship did not describe the relationship between Gabrielle Fraser and the man who, by her invitation, was beneath her husband's roof. It was to me a painful discovery. This was how I made it.

One morning I was sitting in the conservatory, one door of which opened into the drawing-room. I think I was half asleep, or, at any rate, far away in thought. Suddenly I heard voices in the drawing-room—heard them plainly, for the glass-door was half opened. I heard Brandon say, in deep, stern accents, "Gabrielle, the time has come to end all this."

There was a pause and a sigh. "What can I do?" said the woman softly.

"Do! Fly with me at once. Leave the book-worm to his musty books. He will forget you in a week."

"I can not! I can not! I will not! Think what it means—think of my future."

"I thought you loved me," said the man slowly and distinctly.

"Love you! Ah, Heavens—you know I love you!"

I heard the sound of a kiss. I heard whispered words of passion. Then I rose from my seat, and with a heart aching for the man whom I now called my friend, passed quietly out of the door

into the garden, and strove to decide how I was called upon to act—what was the right and the best thing to do.

Ought I to go to Fraser and tell him all I had learned? I was the man's guest. I had eaten his bread and salt. I could not shut my eyes to what was passing beneath his roof. Nevertheless, by communicating what I had unwittingly heard to him, I should create a breach which might never be closed. I might force a woman to take that desperate step from which I could not help hoping and thinking she recoiled. Still, I was bound to do something. I could not help, for once in my life, wishing that I had more worldly wisdom by which to shape my course. I wanted to act in a way which would save my friend from the grief which overhung him, and save his wife from the sin she was about to commit, and the attendant shame and remorse. I did not, could not believe she had gone too far to be saved.

So I resolved, rightly or wrongly, that before making Fraser acquainted with the treachery, I would appeal to his wife, and I would let Brandon know that his guilty secret was mine. But the price of my keeping the secret must be the man's leaving the house at once. My task was a painful one, but I dared not shrink from it. It should be done at once.

However, I could not begin it until late that night. Fraser joined me shortly after I had

decided how to act. He was with me all the afternoon, and there was company at dinner in the evening. I waited until every one had retired to rest, and then walked to Brandon's room and tapped at the door. I found the man half undressed, and smoking a cigar. With a look of surprise he allowed me to enter his room.

I wasted no time in appeals to his conscience. His, I guessed, was not a nature to be guided by the great dictum of right and wrong. I went straight to the point. I told him I knew every thing, and that unless he left the house to-morrow morning Fraser should share my knowledge.

The man grew white to the lips. His dark eyes glittered strangely. The thought struck me that, were we two alone in a solitary place, my life would not be worth much. He muttered between his teeth, and I knew he was cursing me. Presently he looked at me with a sneering smile. "So you have been listening at keyholes," he said, "a fitting employment for a priest!"

"No matter what I have been doing. Will you go?"

He knitted his brows, and for some minutes remained in sullen thought. I heard him grit his teeth. At last he raised his head. "You have the whip hand of me," he said calmly. "I suppose for her sake I must go—but not to-morrow. I will go before the end of the week."

"No. To-morrow."

"I will go before the end of the week. If that does not suit you, go and tell that fool Fraser all. I don't care much which way it is."

I left him. After all, his going was not the greatest point. My hope was that the appeal which I intended to make to-morrow to the erring woman would be successful. Her I meant to exhort and entreat, not threaten. That night before I went to rest I prayed long and earnestly that my efforts might be successful.

The morning was a glorious one, but my sad thoughts made the sunshine seem incongruous. I took a stroll round the garden before breakfast, and to my surprise, encountered Brandon. He was generally the last down. He looked white and ill, and I was not sorry to think that his night had been a troubled one. He gave me a curt nod, and entered the house. Through the dining-room window I saw him go to the spirit case which stood on the side-board, pour out a glass of neat brandy, and drink it. I waited in the garden a few minutes, fearing that Mrs. Fraser was somewhere about and had taken this opportunity of meeting the man who was working her ruin. But no, she came down stairs with her husband, and it was evident this was her first appearance.

The breakfast was a dull affair, although Mrs. Fraser's manner toward me showed me that as yet Brandon had found no opportunity for letting her know that I had discovered the intrigue. Perhaps



he had risen early in hopes of doing so. Gabrielle looked very fair and beautiful in her spotless white morning gown. Poor girl! she was but a girl, and my heart was sad for her as I looked at her and thought how she was hovering on the brink of a precipice.

Breakfast over, we three men went outside the house and sat on the garden-seat. Brandon lighted one of his large cigars. As he did so, I noticed that the hand holding the match trembled like that of a man with the palsy. Maurice Fraser and I kept up a desultory conversation, but Brandon smoked in gloomy silence. Fraser rallied him on his unsociable behavior, Ah, he little knew to what cause it was due!

I kept a sharp look-out for the chance of seeing Mrs. Fraser alone. Presently I saw her in the conservatory, cutting withered blooms from the plants. I rose from my seat, entered the conservatory, and to insure against interruption took the liberty of locking the garden door. Gabrielle greeted me with a pleasant smile. "Have you come to help me, Mr. Denys?" she said.

"Yes," I said, taking her hand, "in God's mercy I have come to help you."

My solemn accents told her every thing. A flood of crimson rushed to her face and neck. She strove to speak. I checked her and led her into the drawing-room. From the window I could see her husband sitting by his false friend, and I could

see the little blue line of smoke curling up from the latter's cigar.

What I said that day to Gabrielle Fraser has no place in this story. Such powers of persuasion as I possess I used to the best of my ability. Such help as I could give, I gave. I take no credit to myself; but it is to me an unspeakable consolation to think that ere we parted I had a weeping, and I believe, truly penitent, woman at my side.

"If Maurice only loved me," she sobbed out at last, "all might be well."

"But he does love you—he must love you," I said.

"He is cold to me—there is something, some cloud between us. We have drifted away from each other."

I took her hand. "Mrs. Fraser," I said, "I believe your husband loves you dearly and faithfully. If there is any misunderstanding between you, a word from you would remove it. Go to him, place your arms round his neck, tell him you love him, and all will be sunshine, and I shall not have spoken this morning in vain."

We were standing in the middle of the room. Her eyes were red with weeping. At that moment I saw Maurice Fraser with a book under his arm, strolling across the lawn toward the shrubbery. He was, I knew, going to his favorite seat.

"See, there he goes," I said. "Follow him,

and if you can ask his pardon, ask it. Believe me, there is no time like the present."

I pleaded earnestly. She hesitated, and hung her head. Then she turned away and went toward the door. "Yes, I will go at once," she said. I opened the door and saw her go up stairs, no doubt to her room, to remove traces of distress.

Then with a lighter heart I went into the garden and sat down by the side of Brandon. I was determined he should not interfere and wreck every thing. He took little or no notice of me. His face, I remarked, was very pale, and his eyes were fixed on Maurice's vanishing figure. Long after it had disappeared in the shrubs, Brandon gazed in that one direction. Presently he started to his feet. Gabrielle was crossing the lawn and making for the entrance to the shrubbery.

"Where is she going?" she asked hastily.

I could not resist the triumph of right over wrong, "She is going," I said, "to her husband, to endeavor to undo such mischief as you have wrought. May heaven go with her!"

He paid no heed to my words. "Mrs. Fraser, Gabrielle," he cried, "stop! I want to speak to you."

She turned for a moment at the sound of his voice. Then shaking her head, went on toward the shrubbery, and vanished from our sight. With a fierce oath Brandon ran across the lawn after her.

My blood boiled. Here was this villain, in open daylight, and without the faintest sense of shame, about to do his utmost to undo the good work which I believed I had effected. There was no time for verbal protest. Yet I determined I would stop him. I sprang forward in pursuit, and in half a dozen strides I was beside him. Shall I be blamed when I say that I swung round my right leg and with one sweep hacked him over as years ago I had hacked over many a good fellow when playing football at Rugby. Men fall heavier than boys. Brandon went down like a stone, and it seemed as if all the breath was knocked out of his body. His eyes glared at me.

"After her, you fool," he gasped out. "Stop her—don't let her see it. She will go mad." He struggled to his feet, but was for the while utterly unable to move.

He spoke in riddles, but there was that in his manner which told me his desire to arrest Gabrielle's steps arose from more than the wish to prevent her from becoming reconciled to her husband. I knew not what to fear, but, nevertheless, I ran swiftly up to the winding path which led to the broad walk, along the top of the little wooded hill. There I paused. There seemed no earthly reason why I should hurry.

The picture is before me now. I could see in the distance Maurice Fraser standing with his back toward me. His shoulders were bent, and

he seemed to be examining something attentively. I could see Gabrielle walking slowly toward him, and I rejoiced at the sight.

I saw her reach him, lay her hand softly on his shoulder. I saw Maurice turn round suddenly as he felt her touch. I saw him raise his hand. I saw something glitter in the sunshine. I saw his hand fall, and in a moment, with a shriek of pain, Gabrielle Fraser fell a dead heap at her husband's feet.

I heard another cry, and knew that Brandon was behind me, and had seen all. I rushed forward. My first glance was given at the fallen woman. Her life blood was streaming down her white dress. Even as she fell she must have plucked the weapon from the wound. It lay by her side, and in spite of the horror of that moment I knew it. I knew the flame-shaped tapering blade. I knew the dull green jade handle with the inscribed facets. It was the accursed *Bichwa*—the dagger which twenty years ago I had handled with such strange results.

I was beside myself with grief and horror. Impulsively, I seized the fatal weapon, and hurled it far away into the wood. Then I kneeled down by the poor girl, and tried to staunch the flow of blood.

It was no use. Her eyes were closing fast. I rose to my feet, and after glancing at Frazer, who stood like a statue or a man stupefied, I rushed to

the house and gave the alarm. When I returned to the fatal spot I found the murderer standing just as I left him, but Brandon, regardless of his presence, was on his knees and embracing and kissing the poor dead creature. I tore him off: my brain was in too great a whirl to work out the problem, but I knew that in some way he was answerable for the horrible deed.

And all the while Maurice Fraser stood as motionless as his victim. Ever and anon I heard him mutter like a man in a dream, "What have I done? Why did I do it?" He followed me passively to the house, where he went off into a dead faint.

As for Brandon, I never saw him after I tore him from Gabrielle's body. He went straight away, heaven only knows where. He was sought for, but never traced. His absence gave rise to strange reports, and was freely commented upon.

I can not bring myself to describe the inquest, and the arrest and trial of Maurice Fraser. The whole case was, so far as the public was concerned, wrapped in impenetrable mystery. But the broad fact that Maurice Fraser had killed his wife was clear as daylight. Wrong as it may have been to do so, I held my tongue about many things. Had I, for instance, spoken of Brandon's guilty passion for Gabrielle, a motive for the murder might have been established which would have ruined the plea of insanity set up on behalf of the accused.

I justified my silence by the conviction I felt that Fraser knew nothing of what I had learned, and so had really no motive for the crime.

If ever a true plea of insanity was urged it was in this case. The poor fellow seemed to have sunk into a merciful oblivion as to what had taken place. He was acquitted, but ordered to be confined during her Majesty's pleasure.

The dagger was sought for, but never found. I was severely censured for my thoughtless conduct in hurling it away. Indeed, in summing up, the judge said the case was one of the most unsatisfactory he had ever known.

Unsatisfactory indeed—wrapped in utter mystery to all save me. And yet, had I stood up in court and stated all that I knew, the mystery would have been greater, or I should have been jeered at as a madman.

Can I at the end of this story give any elucidation? As to the central mystery—the occult diabolical power proved to me beyond doubt as possessed by that old world weapon—none. As to the way in which human hands directed this power, I have the following scraps of evidence.

Upon making inquiries as to whom Brandon was, I found him to be a man of fortune, who had inherited his wealth *from a distant relative named Hood.*

Poor Fraser died some months ago. I was with him at the end. Just as life was quitting,

reason returned. He grasped my hand, and, speaking a hoarse, strange whisper, said, "Who put that devil's dagger on the seat for me to find? Was it Brandon?" Before I could answer him he was dead.

But I answer him here. I say that the man to whom that dagger passed knew its powers. I say that on the morning after I had threatened him with exposure, he laid it where Fraser would see it and handle it. I say, moreover, that my well-meant efforts to save her from sin and shame sent Gabrielle Fraser to receive the blow which, fallen a minute before, would have made her a widow and free for her lover to wed.

And I say that the guilt of her death and of her husband's madness and miserable end lies on Ralph Brandon, and will one day be requited to him.

There is my tale. A tale which I have been tempted to tell, but which, I fear, I shall hereafter regret having told.















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